

LITERARY BY-PATHS IN OLD ENGLAND



HENRY C. SHELLEY

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



THIS BOOK IS ONE OF
A COLLECTION MADE BY
BENNO LOEWY
1854-1919
AND BEQUEATHED TO
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Cornell University Library
DA 600.S54

Literary by-paths in old England.



3 1924 028 051 948

olin

**LITERARY BY-PATHS IN
OLD ENGLAND**



Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.



SELBORNE FROM THE HANGER. — *Frontispiece*

LITERARY BY-PATHS
IN
OLD ENGLAND

BY
HENRY C. SHELLEY

With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1909

COPYRIGHT, 1906,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

All rights reserved

TO
MY WIFE
K. S.
CON AMORE ,

P R E F A C E

CHIEF among the charms of the English countryside is the field footpath. It may not offer the most direct route between two given points ; but as, avoiding the dusty high road, it leads the wanderer over verdant meadows, through fields of golden grain, or amid the still recesses of sheltering woodlands, he will not grudge the lengthening of his journey. Along such pathways, which best afford opportunities for quiet meditation, eye and ear are often greeted by sights and sounds not seen or heard on the more frequented highway.

Some such function in the world of literature it is the object of these pages to fill. They are not concerned with criticism, that much-travelled and often dust-enveloped thoroughfare ; instead, they attempt to seek out the pleasant places in the lives of those authors of whom the several papers treat. Still, it may be claimed that, notwithstanding the avoidance of literary criticism, these chapters offer a considerable amount of new

information. In the case of Thomas Carlyle, a visit to his native village resulted in the glean-
ing of some characteristic and unpublished stories
of the sage and his family; while the papers on
John Keats and Thomas Hood are, thanks to the
kindness of my late friend, Mr. Towneley Green,
R. I., enriched with much fresh and valuable
material. Many of the photographs, also, depict
either places or documents hitherto unidentified
or unpublished.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. IN SPENSER'S FOOTSTEPS	1
II. THE HOME OF SIR PHILIP SIDNEY	57
III. MEMORIALS OF WILLIAM PENN	83
IV. THE BIRTHPLACE OF GRAY'S ELEGY . . .	99
V. GILBERT WHITE'S SELBORNE	125
VI. GOLDSMITH'S "DESERTED VILLAGE" . . .	151
VII. BURNS IN AYRSHIRE	173
VIII. KEATS AND HIS CIRCLE	211
IX. IN CARLYLE'S COUNTRY	267
X. THOMAS HOOD'S HOMES AND FRIENDS . .	311
XI. ROYAL WINCHESTER	367

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Selborne from the Hanger *Frontispiece*

IN SPENSER'S FOOTSTEPS

PAGE

Althorpe House	5
Pembroke College, Cambridge	12
The Water-gate of Essex House, London	22
Myrtle Grove, Youghal	29
Title-page of the First Edition of "The Faerie Queene"	35
Kilcolman Castle	40
A Grant in Spenser's Handwriting	45
Sixteenth Century Plan of Westminster, showing King Street, where Spenser Died	50
Spenser's Tomb	52
Edmund Spenser	54

THE HOME OF SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

Penshurst Village	61
Penshurst Place	64
Penshurst Place: The Ballroom	71
Penshurst Place: The Picture Gallery	75
Saccharissa's Sitting-room	79
Saccharissa's Walk	80

MEMORIALS OF WILLIAM PENN

Church of All Hallows Barking, London, where William Penn was Baptized	87
Jordans Meeting-house	89
Interior of Jordans Meeting-house	91
Graves of Penn and his Wives at Jordans	95

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE BIRTHPLACE OF GRAY'S ELEGY

	PAGE
Stoke Poges Church	103
Stoke Poges Churchyard	105
Stoke Court	109
Gray's Bedroom	110
Gray's Study	110
Gray's Summer-house	111
"The Yew-tree's Shade"	117
Gray's Tomb	118
Gray's Monument	120
Stoke Poges Manor House	121

GILBERT WHITE'S SELBORNE

Cottages in Selborne	129
The Lythe	131
The Plestor	133
Gilbert White's Home	135
Gilbert White's House from the Rear	137
Gilbert White's Sun-dial	138
The Zigzag	140
Wishing Stone on the Hanger	141
Well-head	142
Selborne Parish Register	143
Selborne Church	145
In Selborne Church	147
Knights Templars' Tombs	148
Gilbert White's Grave	148

GOLDSMITH'S "DESERTED VILLAGE"

Athlone	156
The Deserted Village	159
Glassen Village	163
Goldsmith House	165
The "Glassy Brook"	167
The Busy Mill	168
The "Decent Church"	169
The Centre of Ireland	170
Goldsmith's Grave in the Temple, London	171

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BURNS IN AYRSHIRE

PAGE

Alloway's "Auld Haunted Kirk"	178
Grave of Burns's Father	180
The Brig o' Doon	182
Mount Oliphant	184
Lochlea Farm	187
Tarbolton	189
On the Fail	192
Masonic Lodge, Tarbolton	193
Willie's Mill	194
Mossgiel Farm	197
The Field of the Daisy	199
The Cowgate, Mauchline	201
Poosie Nansie's, Mauchline	202
Nanse Tinnock's	203
Mauchline Castle	205
Mary Morrison's Home	206
The Banks of Ayr	208

KEATS AND HIS CIRCLE

Façade of Keats's Schoolhouse	217
Haydon's Life-mask of Keats	221
John Hamilton Reynolds	222
Mr. Reynolds, Snr.	223
Mrs. Reynolds, Snr.	224
Mrs. Green, <i>née</i> Mariane Reynolds	226
Mrs. John Hamilton Reynolds	231
Record in the Pupils' Entry Book of Guy's Hospital, London	246
Record in the Pupils' Entry Book of Guy's Hospital, London	247
Extract from the Register of Apothecaries' Hall, London	249
Keats's Note-book as Medical Student	251
The Back of Mr. Taylor's Fleet Street House	253
Keats in his Study at Hampstead	257
Letter from Keats to Dilke	259
Great College Street, Westminster	261
Keats's Copy of Shakespeare	262
Keats's Last Sonnet	263

IN CARLYLE'S COUNTRY

Ecclefechan	271
Arch House, Ecclefechan	274

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Room in which Carlyle was Born	275
Carlyle's First Schoolhouse	281
The Old Meeting-house, Ecclefechan	283
Mainhill	287
Hoddam Hill	291
Scotsbrig	295
The "Kind Beech Rows of Ecclefechan"	299
Carlyle's Grave	305
Carlyle's London Home	308

THOMAS HOOD'S HOMES AND FRIENDS

Elm-tree Avenue, Ham House	314
Certificate of Birth of Thomas Hood	319
Robert Street, Adelphi	343
Sketch by Hood to Celebrate the Marriage of Mariane Reynolds	349
Rose Cottage, Winchmore Hill	350
Lake House, Wanstead	351
Hood's Trees at Wanstead	353
Mrs. Hood, <i>née</i> Jane Reynolds	354
No. 17, Elm-tree Road, St. John's Wood	355
Thomas Hood	357
No. 1, Adam Street, Adelphi	362
Hood's Grave in Kensal Green Cemetery	363
Medallion on Hood's Monument	366

ROYAL WINCHESTER

Wolvesey Castle	371
Hyde Abbey	373
Supposed Grave of Alfred the Great	377
Izaak Walton's Grave	380
House in which Jane Austen Died	383
Jane Austen's Grave	384
Winchester Deanery	386
The Entrance to St. Cross	388
The Dole at St. Cross	391
In the Cloisters of St. Cross	393
Pope's Schoolhouse at Twyford	395
Twyford House	397

I

IN SPENSER'S FOOTSTEPS

LITERARY BY-PATHS IN OLD ENGLAND

I

IN SPENSER'S FOOTSTEPS

But Spenser I could have read for ever. Too young to trouble myself about the allegory, I considered all the knights and ladies and dragons and giants in their outward and exoteric sense, and God only knows how delighted I was to find myself in such society.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

EDMUND SPENSER'S footprints are hidden under the detritus of three hundred years. It was an age of national cataclysm in which the bright lamp of his spirit was untimely extinguished; England still felt the after-glow of the Armada, and the pride of conquest infused the country with a strength for which it had no conscious outlet. The life of the nation ran high. "English adventurers were exploring untravelled lands and distant oceans; English citizens were growing in wealth and importance; the farmers made the soil give up twice its former yield; the nobility, however fierce their private feuds and

LITERARY BY-PATHS

rivalries might be, gathered around the Queen as their centre." In this new haste of life there was no time to carve deeper the footprints of a poet who had been an exile so many years ; the men who could have done it if they would, joined their friend in the silent land with that labour left undone. And the life of the nation rushed ever on and on. Years after, when patient eyes sought those footprints, and tried to map out again the earthly pilgrimage of that rare spirit, little was left to aid their pious quest.

Less is known of the parents of Spenser than of those of almost any other great poet of the modern world. Two facts practically exhaust our certain knowledge. His father was related to that family of Spensers from which the victor of Blenheim sprung. "The nobility of the Spensers," wrote Gibbon, "has been illustrated and enriched by the trophies of Marlborough ; but I exhort them to consider the 'Faerie Queene' as the most precious jewel of their coronet." What exactly the relationship was it is impossible to say ; that there was such a connection between the poet and the ancestors of the Spencer-Churchill family has never been questioned. The poet himself claimed such a relationship, and had his claim allowed. To three of

IN OLD ENGLAND

the daughters of Sir John Spencer — the head of the family in his time — Spenser dedicated poems, and in those dedications, and elsewhere in his verse, he asserts his kinship with those ladies and their house. To the Lady Strange he speaks of “some private bands of affinitie, which



ALTHORPE HOUSE

The Seat of Earl Spencer

it hath pleased your Ladiship to acknowledge ;” to the Lady Carey of “name or kindred’s sake by you vouchsafed ;” and in that poem which is the most autobiographic document he has left us — “Colin Clouts Come Home Againe” — he sums the trio together as,

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“The sisters three,
The honor of the noble familie
Of which I meanest boast my selfe to be,
And most that unto them I am so nie.”

In one of his sonnets, Spenser gives us another group of three ladies who entered largely into his life, comprising his mother, his Queen, and his wife. The link which bound them together was that of a common name:

“Ye three Elizabeths! for ever live,
That three such graces did unto me give.”

This meagre fact, then, that her name was Elizabeth, is all that Spenser has recorded of his mother. But of both father and mother some little additional information has been offered in recent years. While investigating the manuscripts of an old Lancashire family, Mr. R. B. Knowles happened upon documents which led him to conclude that the poet's parents, by the time their son entered Cambridge, were living at Burnley in Lancashire. If this theory should ever be removed into the category of fact it would clear up much of the mystery which enshrouds that period of Spenser's life between his farewell to Cambridge and his appearance in London. It is indisputable that he spent much

of that interval in the north of England, but where and with whom he lived are not known.

East Smithfield is pointed out as the locality of Spenser's birth; the year 1552 as the date. Few districts in London have altered so utterly out of recognition as the reputed scene of the poet's birth. Its vicinity to Tower Hill, then a focus of Court life, is suggestive enough of its importance as a residential district in Elizabethan times. Although careful search has been made among the registers of all the churches in the neighbourhood, no entry of Spenser's birth or baptism has been discovered; for the place and for the date tradition is our only authority. It is true that one of Spenser's sonnets is cited as evidence that he was born in 1552, but in offering such a witness two facts have to be taken for granted, namely, that the sonnet was written in 1593, and that its "fourty" years *were* forty years, rather than a lesser or greater period expressed in even numbers for poetic purposes.

Prior to the discovery by Mr. Knowles, referred to above, all biographers of Spenser were forced to pass at once from his birth to his student days at Cambridge, but now it is possible to fill in the blank with some interesting facts as to the poet's school-days. One writer minimised

LITERARY BY-PATHS

that blank by dismissing the question of his school-days as of no moment ; but that, surely, is a new theory of biography. Among the manuscripts unearthed by Mr. Knowles was one which gave a detailed account of the spending of the bequests of a London citizen named Robert Nowell, and from this it was learned that Spenser was a pupil of the Merchant Taylors' School. Such a discovery directs the enquirer at once to the archives of the school itself ; and happily these are of such a nature as to throw a flood of light on the early educational environment of the poet.

It was in 1561 that the Merchant Taylors bethought themselves of founding a school, intended principally for the children of the citizens of London, and the estate purchased for the purpose included several buildings and a chapel. The statutes framed for the administration of the school are suggestive of its character. Children were not to be admitted unless they could read and write and say the catechism in English or Latin ; the school hours, both summer and winter, were from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M., with an interval between 11 and 1 o'clock ; three times each day the pupils, "kneeling on their knees," were to say the prayers appointed "with due tract and paus-

IN OLD ENGLAND

ing." Nor are these particulars the only facts from which the imagination can weave its picture of the boy Spenser in school. The head-master in Spenser's time, and for many years after, was Dr. Richard Mulcaster, of whom Andrew Fuller has drawn this picture: "In a morning he would exactly and plainly construe and parse the lesson to his scholars; which done, he slept his hour (custom made him critical to proportion it) in his desk in the school, but woe be to the scholar that slept the while. Awaking, he heard them accurately; and *Atropos* might be persuaded to pity as soon as he to pardon, where he found just fault. The prayers of cockering mothers prevailed with him as much as the requests of indulgent fathers, rather increasing than mitigating his severity on their offending children; but his sharpness was the better endured because impartial; and many excellent scholars were bred under him." In that last remark, Fuller wrote wiser than he knew. How it would have rounded his sentence had his knowledge enabled him to write the name of Spenser among those scholars! For Spenser was a deeply learned poet, and it is not idle to suppose that his passion for knowledge owed much to this severe mentor of his youthful days.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

How came Spenser to be sent to Cambridge? Some light is thrown upon this question by a further consideration of the history of the Merchant Taylors' School. A few years after that school was established, the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London suggested to the Merchant Taylors the advisability of founding a scholarship at one of the universities. The company replied that as they had been to so much expense in establishing the school they could not burden their funds with that further charge, but they were willing to suggest that such scholarships might be founded at the cost of any individual member who might feel so disposed. Until that was done, however, the school did not lack for friends willing to carry out the Lord Mayor's suggestion. The yearly examination of the school took place in that chapel referred to above, and among the scholarly men present at the first examination was Archdeacon Watts, who had already founded scholarships at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, "with a general preference for youths educated at schools in the metropolis." It is explicitly stated that several of his first scholars were such as had attracted his notice during the annual examination, and that fact, taken in conjunction with another,

makes it practically certain that Spenser was one of those early participants of his bounty. The other fact which supports this theory is that Dean Alexander Nowell frequently attended the yearly examination of the Merchant Taylors' School; and that Spenser was one of the scholars who profited from the estate of his brother Robert Nowell points surely to a friendly talk on the poet's behalf between Dean Nowell and Archdeacon Watts.

Robert Nowell died early in the year 1569, and in the accounts for his funeral there is a list giving the names of six boys of the Merchant Taylors' School to whom two yards of cloth were given to make their gowns. The name of Edmund Spenser stands first on that list. Two months later his name appears again in the accounts of Robert Nowell, the entry, under date April 28, reading: "to Edmond Spensore, scholler of the m'chante tayler scholl, at his gowinge to penbrocke hall in chambridge, xs." On the 20th of the following month, that is, May, 1569, Spenser entered Pembroke Hall (now Pembroke College) as a sizar, and during his student days there he was several times indebted to the Nowell funds for small gifts of money. He probably needed them all. Pov-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

erty and ill health marked his university career. The college records prove the latter ; his position as sizar, independent of his description as a “poure scholler” in the Nowell accounts, the former.



PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Of Spenser as a Cambridge student we have but a shadowy picture. He took his B.A. in 1573, his M.A. in 1576 ; he made two friends in the persons of Gabriel Harvey and Edward Kirke ; he planted, if tradition speaks truly, the mulberry tree which still survives in the garden of his college. Some biographers would have us believe that his undergraduate days were em-

IN OLD ENGLAND

bittered by conflicts with the authorities, but we have no reliable data for such an opinion. John Aubrey, in a statement which must be examined later, asserted that the poet "missed the fellowship there which Bishop Andrews got," but throws no further light on the subject. Perhaps the theory that Spenser was unhappy in his student life receives slight support from the fact that although he refers with affection to his university he makes no mention of his college. The reference to Cambridge is in the fourth book (Canto XI) of the "Faerie Queene," where the poet describes the rivers which he summons to grace the wedding of the Thames and the Medway.

"Next these the plenteous Ouse came far from land,
By many a city and by many a towne
And many rivers taking under-hand
Into his waters as he passeth downe,
The Cle, the Were, the Grant, the Sture, the Rowne.
Thence doth by Huntingdon and Cambridge flit,
My mother Cambridge, whom as with a Crowne
He doth adorne, and is adorn'd of it
With many a gentle Muse and many a learned wit."

It is known that Spenser left Cambridge in 1576 on taking his M.A. degree, and it is also established that he was in London by October, 1579. Where did he spend the interval? If

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Mr. Knowles is correct in thinking the poet's parents were now living at Burnley, it is natural to suppose that a part of the time at least was passed in their company. All authorities are agreed, and on good evidence, that Spenser went into the north of England on leaving Cambridge, but it seems impossible to locate his exact whereabouts. Just here, however, it is right that the statement of John Aubrey, the antiquarian, should be considered. Aubrey, who was born some twenty-seven years after Spenser's death, had an intimate acquaintance with many famous English writers, and it is to him we are indebted for many vivid facts about Bacon, Milton, Raleigh, and others. He is, in short, a credible witness, whose testimony carries great weight even in the face of improbability. In one of his manuscripts, then, he sets down these particulars of our poet: "Mr. Edmond Spenser was of Pembroke-hall, in Cambridge. He missed the fellowship there which Bishop Andrews got. He was an acquaintance of Sir Erasmus Dryden; his mistress Rosalinde was a kinswoman of Sir Erasmus's lady. The chamber there at Sir Erasmus's is still called 'Spenser's chamber.' Lately in the college, taking down the wainscot of his chamber, they found abun-

IN OLD ENGLAND

dance of cards, with stanzas of the Faery Queen written on them. From John Dryden, poet laureat, Mr. Beeston says, he was a little man, wore short hair, and little band, and little cuffes." Such is Aubrey's interesting statement; but there are two considerations which make the critic hesitate to accept it in an unqualified manner. These are, first, that Sir Erasmus Dryden was, in 1576, of too tender an age to have entered upon the responsibility of matrimony; and, second, that his seat at Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire would hardly harmonise with the theory which locates Spenser in the north of England. Perhaps neither objection is very serious. Sir Erasmus may have wedded at a precocious age, and Spenser may have sojourned in the north of England and still had time to spare for Canons Ashby.

Amid so much that is nebulous in the history of Spenser, it would be a relief to think that the mask has been removed from the fair face of his Rosalind. Of course there have not been lacking theories of her identification; and they have, in the main, been as childish if not as numerous as those which cluster around the person of Dante's Beatrice. No one, however, has yet arisen to dissolve Rosalind away as a myth; she

LITERARY BY-PATHS

was so real to the poet that her personality refuses to be translated into a philosophical abstraction. How real she was, and what a sad time Spenser had with her! Meeting her fresh from college and while full of high hopes as he stood on the threshold of life, her image dominated his life to within a few years of its close. In that autobiographic poem already quoted, which was penned on the eve of his marriage with another woman, he rebukes his fellow shepherds for complaining that Rosalind had repaid his love "with scorne and foule despite."

"For she is not like as the other crew
Of shepheards' daughters that amongst you bee,
But of divine regard and heavenly hew,
Excelling all that ever ye did see.
Not then to her that scorned thing so base,
But to my selfe the blame that lookt so hie."

Perhaps that last phrase lends support to Aubrey's assertion that Rosalind was kinswoman to Sir Erasmus Dryden's lady. Also, it is to be remembered that E. K.'s "glosse" to the April poem of the "Shepheards Calender" points in the same direction. Rosalind, says this witness, who was "privie" to the poet's counsel, was a "Gentlewoman of no meane house, nor endewed with anye vulgare and common gifts, both of nature and manners."

IN OLD ENGLAND

Although Spenser loved in vain for himself he did not love in vain for his art. No poet ever does. From the travail of his unrequited passion there were born children of fancy who long ago joined the dwellers of that dream-world which is peopled with the creations of poets. In the words of Dean Church, "Rosalind had given an impulse to the young poet's powers, and a colour to his thoughts, and had enrolled Spenser in that band and order of poets — with one exception, not the greatest order — to whom the wonderful passion of love, in its heights and its depths, is the element on which their imagination works, and out of which it moulds its most beautiful and characteristic creations."

It is certain that Spenser returned to London by October, 1579, and it seems probable that an earlier date may be accepted. One authority declares the poet to have become a member of the household of Leicester House not later than 1578. In the June æglogue of the "Shepheards Calender," Hobbinol (who is Gabriel Harvey in rustic guise) advises his friend Colin Clout (Spenser's poetic name for himself) to "forsake the soyle that so doth thee bewitch" and hie him to the dales,

"Where shepheards ritch,
And fruitful flocks, bene every where to see."

LITERARY BY-PATHS

This advice, avers E. K., "is no Poetical fiction, but unfeynedly spoken of the Poete selfe, who for speciall occasion of private affayres, (as I have bene partly of himselfe informed), and for his more preferment, removing out of the Northparts, came into the South, as Hobbinol indeede advised him privately." In fine, Gabriel Harvey roundly told his friend that life was too serious a thing to be spent in vain regrets for Rosalind; he had better be off to London and try his fortune there. And Gabriel Harvey gave more than advice; he, it seems, was the means of introducing Spenser to Sir Philip Sidney, and thus opening to him the avenue along which such preferment as was to be his lot eventually came.

So persistent and probable is the tradition which makes Spenser the companion of Sidney at Penshurst that one inclines hopefully to the theory which dates the return of the poet some months at least prior to October, 1579. Than Penshurst for a home and Sidney for a companion there could have been no fitter education for the poet who was to sing the swan-song of English chivalry. Time has dealt tenderly with the grey walls of the fair Kentish home of Sidney; they stand to-day little changed by the

IN OLD ENGLAND

summers and winters of more than three centuries. Here, indeed, are environments amid which it is easy to frame a picture of the poet and his courtly friend ; it would strike no discord to meet them in earnest talk in this old-world baronial hall, or wandering arm in arm amid the glades of this ancestral park. "The generall end of all the booke," wrote Spenser of the "Faerie Queene," "is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." And who but Sidney was his model? He "impressed his own noble and beautiful character deeply on Spenser's mind. Spenser saw and learned in him what was then the highest type of the finished gentleman."

But the poet had other occupation at Penshurst than that of studying the character of his host. While it is probable that the "Shepheards Calender" was begun in the north, internal evidence points clearly to its completion amid the southern dales which surround Sidney's home. Wherever begun and ended, the poem was out of Spenser's hands ere the year closed, for on Dec. 5th, 1579, this entry was made on behalf of one "Hughe Singelton" in the register of Stationers' Hall: "*Lycenced unto him the Shepperdes Calender conteyninge*

LITERARY BY-PATHS

xij ecloges proportionable to the xij monthes." Although there are reasons for believing that the "Shepherds Calender" was by no means the first fruits of Spenser's muse, that volume was his first serious bid for the suffrages of Elizabethan England as its chief poet. But the bid was made in a very modest manner. The volume appeared anonymously, under the sheltering wing of a dedication to Sidney, and with a commendatory epistle from the pen of E. K., the initials, as we know, of the poet's Cambridge friend. True, the epistle was bold enough; E. K. had no doubts about the quality of the poet for whom he stood sponsor. Unknown, unkissed, he might be at that moment, "but I doubt not, so soon as his name shall come into the knowledge of men, and his worthiness be sounded in the trump of fame, but that he shall be not only kissed, but also beloved of all, embraced of the most, and wondered at of the best."

Edward Kirke had not long to wait for the fulfilment of his prophecy. Spenser's success appears to have been instantaneous. England was waiting for a new poet, and had grace given to recognise him when he appeared. "But now yet at the last," wrote one critic

IN OLD ENGLAND

while his mind was filled with thoughts of Virgil, "hath England hatched one poet of this sort, in my conscience comparable with the best in any respect: even master Sp., author of the 'Shepherd's Calender,' whose travail in that piece of English poetry I think verily is so commendable, as none of equal judgment can yield him less praise for his excellent skill and skilful excellency showed forth in the same than they would to either Theocritus or Virgil."

Very soothing, no doubt, all this must have been to the "New Poet," as Spencer was called, but also not very satisfying. These fine words did not butter his parsnips. The days were not yet when laudatory reviews and a consensus of favourable opinion had their immediate result in substantial cheques from the publisher. Spenser had come to London "for his more preferment," and praise for his poetry, however comforting, was but a poor stone instead of bread. And yet his success as a singer may have been responsible for such advancement in life as was to be his share. Sidney was the relative of many influential men in those days, and the friend of many more, and he it was, we may be sure, who secured the poet a place in the household of Leicester House. That was a notable

LITERARY BY-PATHS

river-side mansion in Spenser's time. Once the house of Lord Paget, it was now the abode of



THE WATER-GATE OF ESSEX HOUSE, LONDON

the Earl of Leicester, and known by his name. Years after it was by him bequeathed to his son-in-law, the Earl of Essex, and as Essex

IN OLD ENGLAND

House it sheltered Spenser when in London, sixteen years later, on the last quest for "more preferment." It has all vanished now, save the arch and steps at the bottom of Essex Street which once served as the water-gate of the mansion and saw the "two gentle knights" of the "Prothalamion" receive those "two faire Brides, their Loves delight." There are probably no other stones standing in all London which can claim to have figured as these archway pillars did in the life of Spenser.

Perhaps those were not happy days he spent in Leicester House ; instinctively they recall the sorrows of the solitary Florentine and his

"Thou shalt have proof how savourest of salt
The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going down and up another's stairs."

It may have been otherwise ; we cannot tell ; but to the high-spirited man there are few trials so galling as waiting for the opportunity to put out to usury the talents of which he is conscious. Spenser, twenty-eight years old, acknowledged the chief poet of his country since Chaucer, well-equipped for serving the State in high capacity, was waiting, wearily waiting, for something to do. It was his mischance that that age bred a plethora of able men.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

At last his opportunity came, but in a form he probably little expected. It seems clear that his heart was set on some state service which would give him space to approve the reputation he had won ; his letters to his friend Harvey bristle with poetic projects and schemes for high achievement in the realm of letters. That he fulfilled his mission, but independent of the aid he had anticipated, is not the least jewel in his crown.

While Spenser was still waiting, the ministers of Elizabeth were struggling with that problem which has been the nightmare of English statesmen for countless generations,—the problem of what to do with Ireland. Deputy after deputy, many of them men of clear vision and high purpose, had returned home foiled in the task of giving that country a stable government. Sidney's father, Sir Henry Sidney, had been the last to resign the hopeless labour, and for two years the Queen had no personal representative among her Irish subjects. But circumstances had arisen which made the appointment of a new deputy an urgent necessity, and in the summer of 1580 Lord Grey of Wilton was appointed to fill that "great place which had wrecked the reputation and broken the hearts of a succession of able and high-spirited servants of the

IN OLD ENGLAND

English Crown." This appointment was of great moment to Spenser, for, probably at the advice of Philip Sidney, Lord Grey made choice of the "New Poet" as his secretary.

For the remainder of Spenser's life we have to think of him as an exile. There were, it is true, as will be seen, several visits home, each undertaken apparently in the hope of "more preferment" on English soil, but those visits are the only relief in the picture. Probably it is quite reasonable to suppose that the poet distilled some enjoyment out of his life in Ireland, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that his absence from London in those days of intense life in literature and politics robbed him of much keen pleasure. He was in the golden era of English letters and yet not of it; it was his fate to "live in the Elizabethan age, and to be severed from those brilliant spirits to which the fame of that age is due."

Socially, too, his new life presented a sad contrast to the environment he had left behind: instead of the settled comfort of Elizabethan England, the perturbed life of rebellious Ireland. His verse reflects the change in many passages, some of which are charged with that pensive feeling which even to-day besets the traveller

LITERARY BY-PATHS

in some parts of Ireland. Once, while freshly remembering the sights and sounds which had greeted him on a brief visit to his native land, and contrasting them with the common events of daily life in the land of his exile, he poured out his spirit in these plaintive lines :

“ For there all happie peace and plenteous store
Conspire in one to make contented blisse.
No wayling there nor wretchedness is heard,
No bloodie issues nor no leprosies,
No griesly famine, nor no raging sward,
No nightly bordrags, nor no hue and cries ;
The shepheards there abroad may safely lie,
On hills and downes, withouten dread or daunger.”

Our conception of what exactly were Spenser's official occupations in Ireland is by no means so clear as might be wished. He went thither as the new deputy's secretary, and when that office took end he seems to have passed from one clerkship to another until his days were numbered. Various grants were made to him from time to time. Now he receives a lease of the Abbey of Enniscorthy, and a year later a six years' lease of a house in Dublin. When Munster was settled, he shared with many others in the grants of land then made, his portion being the Castle of Kilcolman and an estate of three thousand acres. This was the most

IN OLD ENGLAND

considerable prize that ever fell to his lot, and Kilcolman, as it became his home, is the one definite mark on the map of Ireland which Spenser's name suggests. But none of these grants made him a wealthy man. So far as worldly goods go, the line of Giles Fletcher sums up his case :

“ Poorly, poor man, he lived ; poorly, poor man, he died.”

When Spenser went to Ireland he carried the scheme of the “ Faerie Queene ” with him. He may have shaped it into some form during his college or north of England days ; there can be little doubt that he talked it over with Sidney at Penshurst. But, admitting that the idea of the poem took early root in his mind, the fashioning of it into its final form was accomplished almost wholly on Irish soil. In a curious and very scarce pamphlet, bearing the title of “ A Discourse of Civil Life,” there is given a description of a meeting of literary men, which took place in a cottage near Dublin somewhere between the years 1584 and 1588. The author, Ludowick Bryskett, explains that a debate took place at that meeting on ethics, and he describes himself as asking one member of the company, “ very well read in Philosophy, both moral and natural,”

LITERARY BY-PATHS

to favour the rest with his conclusions on the matter. The one so appealed to was Edmund Spenser. His answer, as reported by Bryskett, inasmuch as it is practically our only Boswellian glimpse of the poet, is worth transcribing : “ Though it may seem hard for me, to refuse the request made by you all, whom every one alone, I should for many respects be willing to gratify ; yet as the case standeth, I doubt not but with the consent of the most part of you, I shall be excused at this time of this task which would be laid upon me ; for sure I am, that it is not unknown unto you, that I have already undertaken a work tending to the same effect, which is in heroical verse under the title of a ‘ Faery Queen ’ to represent all the moral virtues, assigning to every virtue a Knight to be the patron and defender of the same, in whose actions and feats of arms and chivalry the operations of that virtue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten down and overcome. Which work, as I have already well entered into, if God shall please to spare me life that I may finish it according to my mind, your wish will be in some sort accomplished, though perhaps not so effectually as you could desire.”



MYRTLE GROVE, YOUGHAL

IN OLD ENGLAND

Nor is this the only testimony which goes to prove that the "Faerie Queene" was largely written in Ireland. In the sonnets to various noble persons which Spenser published with the poem, he avers more than once that it was produced on "savadge soyle, far from Parnasso Mount." Tradition, then, has everything to support it when it associates the solitary ruins of Kilcolman Castle with the creation of the "Faerie Queene." And there is another tradition which has something in its favour. One of the principal sharers in the planting of Munster was Sir Walter Raleigh, and a large bay window in his house at Youghal is still pointed out as the spot where Spenser wrote many stanzas of his great poem. Certainly Raleigh and Spenser renewed their friendship in Ireland, and there is nothing improbable in the legend which makes the poet a guest at Youghal. This theory makes it plausible to regard Raleigh's presence at Kilcolman in the nature of a return visit, and if he heard nothing of the "Faerie Queene" in his own home it is clear that the omission was rectified in the poet's. Colin Clout puts this beyond a doubt. Sought out in his exile by the "Shepherd of the Ocean," as Raleigh called himself, Spenser was not loth to play his visitor a "pleasant fit" on his pipes,

LITERARY BY-PATHS

in other words, to read him his "heroical verse." Raleigh was quick to measure the value of the work Spenser had done, and forthwith urged him to return to London with him and give it to the world. It is impossible to resist a suspicion that Raleigh was thinking of his own advantage as well as Spenser's. He had left England under the frown of Elizabeth ; to return as sponsor to a poet who would reflect lustre on her person and her reign might be a cheap method of changing the frown to a smile. In any case, Spenser can hardly have wanted much persuasion. He had tasted exile for ten years ; he had finished enough of his great task to make a considerable volume ; it might be that as the "Shepherds Calender" started the sequence of events which took him across the Irish Channel, the "Faerie Queene" would be the means of ending his banishment. Raleigh's plan was approved, and Spenser returned to London in his company, bearing with him the first three books of the "Faerie Queene."

Much had happened of consequence to Spenser during the ten years of his absence. Sidney died in 1586, and Leicester had followed two years later. These two had befriended the poet with their powerful influence, and now he could reckon

on their aid no longer. True, he had strengthened the bonds of friendship with Raleigh, but that might avail him little if Elizabeth remained unkind. It is clear, then, that Spenser must have realised how much depended on the poetic work he brought with him; if that should win the favour of the Queen all might be well, and his life-long search for "more preferment" be successful at last.

Arriving in England probably some time in November, 1589, Spenser lost no time in arranging for the publication of his first instalment of the "Faerie Queene." The "Shepheards Calender" had been published by one Hugh Singleton, of Creed Lane, "at the signe of the Gylden Tunne"; the "Faerie Queene" was entrusted to the hands of William Ponsonby, who did business at the sign of the Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Churchyard. There is no known reason why Spenser changed his publisher, but probably Ponsonby had attracted his attention by the fact that he had secured permission to print Sidney's "Arcadia," and had already obtained the necessary license for its publication. Spenser did not change his publisher again, for although his "View of the Present State of Ireland" was provisionally licensed in 1598, by Mathew Lownes,

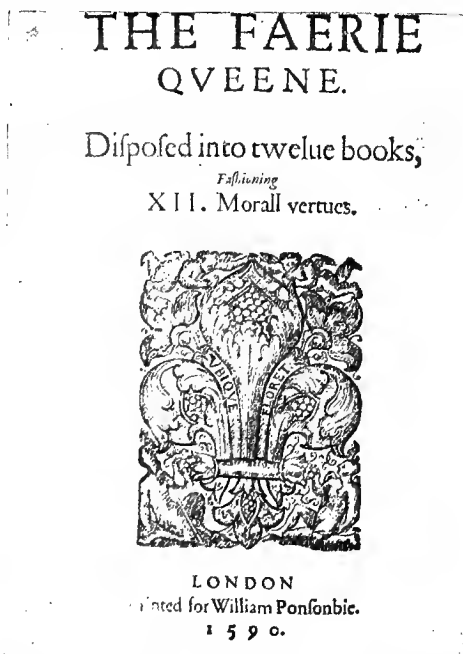
LITERARY BY-PATHS

it was not printed until 1633, thirty-four years after the writer's death. To Ponsonby, then, belonged the honour of issuing the bulk of Spenser's work to the world, and he appears to have availed himself of his privilege with true publisher instinct. For when the "Faerie Queene" proved to be such a success, and had set the tongues of men wagging with Spenser's praise, Ponsonby, on his own initiative, raked together such of the poet's minor verses as were circulating in manuscript and published them in a small volume, protesting to the "gentle reader" that his object in so doing was "the better increase and accomplishment of your delights." There are no records of financial transactions between Spenser and his publisher. Perhaps it is as well there are not; there has been weeping enough over the disproportion between the fame of "Paradise Lost" and the monetary recompense of its author.

When gazing upon the entries of Spenser's various works in the old registers of Stationers' Hall, the centuries that lie between the Edwardian and Elizabethan eras seem to vanish. Here, still vividly legible, is the handwriting of men who knew Ponsonby and possibly the poet by sight, who were witnesses of the birth of books

IN OLD ENGLAND

which have become some of the glories of English literature. It was on the 1st of December, 1589, that, against the name of "Master Ponsonbye,"



TITLE-PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION OF "THE FAERIE QUEENE"

this record was made in one of those ancient registers: "*Entered for his Coppye, a booke intytuled the fayrye Queene dysposed into xij bookes, etc. Authorysed under the handes of the Archbishop of Canterbury and bothe the*

LITERARY BY-PATHS

wardens." It will be seen that the entry makes no reference to the fact that only three of the twelve books were to be published on this occasion. Nor is there any mention of the poet's name; only once, in connection with the "Amoretti" volume of 1594, was his name associated with his work in the Stationers' registers.

Spenser sent his "Shepheards Calender" into the world anonymously, but he claimed the parentage of the "Faerie Queene" from the day of publication. His earlier work had been attributed to various writers; there should be no mystery about this child of his fancy. Not only does he avow his ownership of the poem in his famous explanatory letter to Raleigh, but he sets his name boldly to the dedication addressed to the Queen. That dedication was amplified in a later edition, its original reading being: "To the most mightie and Magnificent Empresse Elizabeth, by the grace of God Queene of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc. Her most humble servant: Ed. Spenser." It would be unjust to attribute this dedication, and the laudation of Elizabeth in the poem itself, to base motives; Spenser was but writing in harmony with the manner of his day. It is true, as Dean Church remarked, that there is nothing in

IN OLD ENGLAND

history which can be compared to the “gross, shameless, lying flattery paid to the Queen,” but the poet did not set that fashion ; his only is the negative blame of not rising above it. Of course he wished to reap what he could from the harvest he had sown, and Raleigh no doubt urged that the “Faerie Queene” should be published as completely as possible under the patronage of Elizabeth.

There was no hesitation or diffidence about the welcome given to Spenser’s new work. His friend, Gabriel Harvey, who had been lukewarm to the idea of the poem when it was first put before him, was won over completely :

“Collyn, I see, by thy new taken taske,
Some sacred fury hath enricht thy braynes.”

Raleigh, as might have been expected, poured forth praise with liberal pen, and imagined Petrarch weeping and Homer trembling at the advent of this rival ; even Nash, who laid about him usually with a whip of scorpions, paused to extol the “stately tuned verse” of the “Faerie Queene.” In short, Spenser’s cup was once more overflowing with praise, as it had done ten years before when he had approved himself England’s new poet. But was praise to be all ? Not quite. Elizabeth, close-fisted as she was, evidently

LITERARY BY-PATHS

thought she must do something for the poet who had done so much for her, and it was like Spenser's luck that his Queen was persuaded to make her bounty less than she had intended. Tradition affirms that Elizabeth ordered a goodly sum to be given the poet, but that on Lord Burghley murmuring "What! all this for a song?" the order was changed into "Well, let him have what is reason." In the end Spenser was awarded a pension of £50 a year, which he began to enjoy in February, 1591.

A pension of £50 a year was better than nothing, but that Spenser was bitterly disappointed in not being offered some State employment in his native England is beyond doubt. Raleigh's friendship had not been such a great gain to him after all, or, perhaps, it would be kinder to say that any effort Raleigh made was thwarted by Burghley. Many reasons have been offered for Burghley's dislike of Spenser, but none of those reasons are so material as the fact that that dislike existed in a pronounced form. Spenser was well aware of the fact; he hints the sad case of the man who has his Prince's grace but wants his Peers'; and he hides up in his lines now and then a sly bit of sweet revenge against Elizabeth's chief minister. But there was to be no success for

IN OLD ENGLAND

him at Court; and when he reached his lonely home in Ireland again, and had time to think calmly over the experiences through which he had passed, he was enabled to reach the sane conclusion that things were best as they were.

“ For, sooth to say, it is no sort of life,
For shepheard fit to lead in that same place,
Where each one seeks with malice, and with strife,
To thrust downe other into foule disgrace,
Himselfe to raise.”

Early in the year 1591 Spenser returned to his Irish home at Kilcolman, and before the year was out he had, in “*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*,” found sufficient reasons for thinking that he ought to be at least moderately contented with his lot. It is pleasant to suppose that he was not altogether lonely in his exile. There are reasons for believing that a sister kept house for him, and probably congenial friends, such as Gabriel Harvey and Ludowick Bryskett, visited him now and then. But for such ameliorations as these, and his delight in verse, his lot would have been almost unendurable. The fact that he was an Englishman would be sufficient to embitter the natives of the district against him, and that feeling must have been intensified a thousandfold by his occupancy of Kilcolman, a castle

LITERARY BY-PATHS

which had once belonged to the Earls of Desmond. The poet's name, like that of Cromwell, is still a word of scorn in Ireland, and such living records as we have of his Kilcolman days are tinged with hatred. One inveterate enemy he had in the person of Lord Roche, who forbid his people to have any trade or conference with



KILCOLMAN CASTLE

Spenser or his tenants, and, in true Irish fashion, killed an animal belonging to a man who had dared to give the poet a night's lodging when returning from the Limerick sessions.

Rosalind has been lost sight of during these years of exile, but not forgotten by Spenser. The closing passages of "Colin Clouts Come Home Againe" describe, as has been seen, the anger of Colin's fellow shepherds for Rosalind's

IN OLD ENGLAND

cruel treatment of their friend, and his defence of his mistress. More, in almost his last words he bids his comrades

“Unto the world for ever witness bee
That her’s I die.”

Alas for the inconstancy of man ! Spenser was not destined to remain faithful to his ideal. Not long after he wrote those words there crossed his path a lady whose name recalled his mother and his Queen, an Elizabeth who was to supplant Rosalind in his life and verse. There is no record of his courtship save that darkly hinted at in his sonnets, but that record is sufficient to prove that he had no easy conquest. At first he appears to have had as little hope of success as with Rosalind, and his verse is overclouded with sombre hues of anticipated rejection. Of course he pours out all the wealth of his fancy in homage to this new-found love.

“What guyle is this, that those her golden tresses
She doth attyre under a net of gold ;
And with sly skill so cunningly them dresses,
That which is gold, or heare, may scarce be told ?
Is it that men’s frayle eyes, which gaze too bold,
She may entangle in that golden snare ;
And, being caught, may craftily enfold
Theyr weaker harts, which are not wel aware ?
Take heed, therefore, myne eyes, how ye doe stare

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Henceforth too rashly on that guilefull nett,
In which, if ever ye entrapped are,
Out of her bands ye by no meanes shall get.
Fondness it were for any, being free,
To covet fetters, though they golden bee !”

For all that, Spenser did covet them, and in June, 1594, he gladly assumed the bonds of wedlock. For wedding present he gave his wife that bridal ode, his “Epithalamion,” which has no rival in any language, to be

“Unto her a goodly ornament,
And for short time an endlesse monument.”

For such a gift surely high-born ladies would be content to forego the choicest coronet or the costliest crown. Sonnets and ode were sent across to Ponsonby the publisher, and Spenser had not been a married man six months before the rich fruit of his love passion had been garnered in the store of English literature.

Almost as soon as the “Amoretti and Epithalamion” volume had been entered at Stationers’ Hall, the poet himself was in London again. Perhaps the increased responsibilities of wedded life made him long once again for “more preferment,” or perhaps the cause for his visit must be sought in the fact that he had finished another three books of the “Faerie Queene,” and was

IN OLD ENGLAND

anxious to see them through the press himself. The Stationers' Hall record of this second instalment of the great poem, again placed to the credit of "Master Ponsonby," reads: "*20th die Januarii. Entred for his copie under the handes of the Wardens, The second parte of the ffaery Quene conteining the 4, 5, and 6 bookes.*" This was in 1596, and it seems probable that Spenser remained in London all through that year and into the beginning of the next. The Earl of Essex was in favour now, that peer who had succeeded to the possession of Leicester House and renamed it after himself, and the poet probably expected that so powerful a friend would pave the way for him to some profitable office at home.

We have only one picture of Spenser during this second visit home, and that was drawn by himself. Towards the end of 1596 he wrote a "Spousal verse" in honour of the marriage, at Essex House, of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, and in that poem he refers to himself as afflicted by

"Sullein care,
Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
In Prince's Court, and expectation vayne
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne."

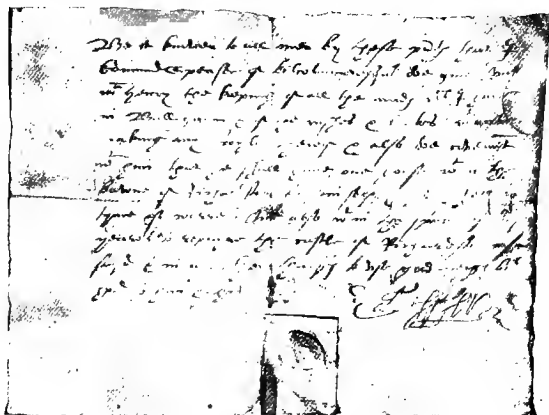
LITERARY BY-PATHS

Although Leicester had not done much for him, he generously implies, now he is dead, that he had been a helpful friend, and thinks of him as one "whose want too well now feels my friendless case." An undercurrent of sadness runs through this "spousal verse;" the poet is conscious of the incongruous effect; he tries to subdue the discord with a higher note of melody; but the feeling left when the music ceases is more akin to pathos than joy. For this, had he known it, was really Spenser's swan-song. There was to be no life of leisured ease for him, nor any home in his smiling native land. He must return to that half-ruined castle on the wild plain at the foot of the Galtee hills, must face the ill-omened scowls of the aliens again, and live on as best he might amid sights and sounds of wretchedness made all the more painful by the remembered contrasts of his beloved England.

In one matter Spenser may have thought himself fortunate. With that ineptitude which was ingrained in his character, King James of Scotland actually asked that the poet should be arrested and punished for the picture he had drawn of his mother Mary Queen of Scots, in the character of Duessa. The passage which

IN OLD ENGLAND

had so moved the Scots King is that in Canto IX, Book IV, of the "Faerie Queene;" he thought little, apparently, of the earlier sketch in the eighth canto of the first book! Having so many friends, and probably some enemies, at court, Spenser no doubt heard of his danger,



A GRANT IN SPENSER'S HANDWRITING

and in those uncertain times he must have fully appreciated the narrow escape he had had. But was not Kilcolman prison enough for such a spirit?

Back, then, to Ireland, to Kilcolman, again, and now for the last time. The date is uncertain, but it was probably early in 1597. He lived quietly through that year, and as the next

LITERARY BY-PATHS

year was waning to its close there came the welcome news that he had been appointed Sheriff of the county of Cork. Lord Burghley was dead, and now, perchance, he was on the highroad to that "more preferment" he had sought so long. In this year of new hope he had prepared, for the Queen's special guidance, a brief paper on the state of Ireland, and its proem is the last sigh we catch from his lips: "Out of the ashes of desolation and wasteness of this your wretched Realm of Ireland, vouchsafe, most mighty Empress our dread sovereign, to receive the voices of a few most unhappy ghosts (of whom is nothing but the ghost now left), which lie buried in the bottom of oblivion, far from the light of your gracious sunshine." That deep-shadowed picture is suddenly illumined by the promise of brighter days for the poet. But it is only such a rift in the clouds as heralds the denser darkness before the storm.

That autumn of 1598, which seemed so full of hope for Spenser, saw the culmination of another of those wild rebellions which swept over Ireland so frequently in the reign of Elizabeth. Spenser was "living among ruins. An English home in Ireland, however fair, was a home on the sides of Ætna or Vesuvius: it stood where the lava

IN OLD ENGLAND

flood had once passed, and upon not distant fires." The poet was not blind to the dangers amid which he lived. His report to Elizabeth, and his prose work giving a "View of the Present State of Ireland," witness to his clear knowledge of the political unrest by which he was surrounded. Still, he can hardly have thought that danger was so near, for the wild onrush of the rebels in October found him utterly unprepared to resist their attack on Kilcolman Castle. That attack was only too successful. The poet, with his wife and children, had to fly for their lives, and the building was given to the flames. Ben Jonson told that a new-born child of Spenser's perished in the burning castle, but happily there are no valid reasons for crediting that assertion; the picture is dark enough without that added touch.

It is a mistake to think that the Munster rebellion drove Spenser from Ireland. He and his family made their way to Cork, and there they were secure from further attack. The fact that his wife and children did not leave the country is proof that the rebels had done their worst by burning Kilcolman, and that there was no more to fear from them. Also, it is to be remembered that Sir Thomas Norreys, the Pres-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

ident of Munster, sought safety in Cork, thereby bringing upon himself a severe rebuke from the Government for his cowardice. If Cork had not been a secure retreat, there would have been no sting in the rebuke. No, it was not the rebellion which sent Spencer across the Irish Channel again; he went as the bearer of a dispatch from Sir Thomas Norreys, being chosen for that errand, probably, because his personal knowledge might be useful to the authorities in London. Norreys wrote his dispatch on December 9th and committed it to Spenser's care. The poet was going home for the last time.

Between the writing of the dispatch and its delivery at Whitehall, fifteen days elapsed. Perchance the poet had a stormy passage, and with nerves and body shattered by the bitter experiences of the previous months, this may have set the seal on his fate. He was but forty-six years old; some explanation seems necessary for his being suddenly cut down in the prime of life. He was able, it seems, to deliver his dispatch on December 24th, and then we lose sight of him until the 16th of the following month. On that day he died.

Tradition, in the person of Ben Jonson, has invested the death-bed of Spenser with uncalled-

IN OLD ENGLAND

for and unbelievable pathos. "He died," Jonson told Drummond, "for want of bread in King Street; he refused 20 pieces sent him by my Lord Essex, and said he was sure he had no time to spend them." This legend of starvation was repeated by other writers, but no evidence has been adduced in its support. No student of Spenser's life could so far forget his facts as to affirm that the poet had attained a state of affluence at his death; on the other hand, it is impossible for him to believe that death ensued from actual want of bread. For, consider the facts of the case. Spenser was now Sheriff of the county of Cork, and he had come to London as messenger of the President of Munster to the English Court. If he had been in extreme monetary need on his arrival in London, there were many in the capital who would at once have relieved his wants. The scene of his death, a tavern in King Street, Westminster, also tells against the starvation legend. King Street, then the only highway between the Royal Palace of Whitehall and the Parliament House, was a street of considerable importance, and Spenser's presence there is explained by Stow's remark that "for the accommodation of such as come to town in the terms, here are some good

LITERARY BY-PATHS

inns for their reception, and not a few taverns for entertainment, as is not unusual in places of



SIXTEENTH CENTURY PLAN OF WESTMINSTER. SHOWING KING STREET, WHERE SPENSER DIED

great confluence.” There are ample proofs, too, that King Street was the usual resort of those who were messengers to the Court, such as

IN OLD ENGLAND

Spenser then was. Happily, then; there are no grounds for believing that the poet died for want of bread; it was tragedy enough that such a life should have gone out at so early an age.

There was but one burial place for Spenser — that Abbey in which the dust of Chaucer had already consecrated Poets' Corner to be the sepulture of England's sweet singers. It is said that Spenser asked a resting-place near that sacred dust, and such a wish was natural in one who knew he was Chaucer's lineal successor. Lord Essex defrayed the charges of the funeral, and poets bore the pall and cast upon the coffin their elegies and the pens with which they were written. Although Spenser had achieved his chief work on Irish soil, it was given him to rest at home at last.

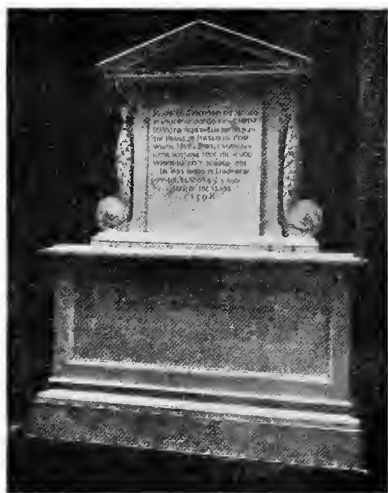
“'T is well ; 't is something ; we may stand
Where he in English earth is laid.”

According to a passage in Browne's “*Britannia's Pastorals*,” Spenser was fated to be robbed of Queen Elizabeth's bounty even in the grave. Browne narrates how the Queen gave explicit orders for the building of a costly tomb over the poet's remains, and then adds :

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“The will had been performance, had not Fate,
That never knew how to commiserate,
Suborned curst Avarice to lie in wait
For that rich prey (gold is a taking bait) :
Who, closely lurking like a subtle snake
Under the covert of a thorny brake,
Seized on the factor by fair Thetis sent,
And robbed our Colin of his monument.”

But Spenser did not lack for a monument, although it was more than twenty years after



SPENSER'S TOMB

his death before such a memorial was supplied through the generosity of Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset. A hundred and fifty years after, that monument had fallen into decay, but its

IN OLD ENGLAND

appearance is faithfully reproduced by the existing marble, which was erected by subscription in 1778 at the instigation of the poet Mason. It will be seen that the inscription differs in two particulars from the accepted dates of Spenser's life, giving 1553 instead of 1552 as the date of his birth, and 1598 instead of 1599 as the year of his death.

Several portraits (in oils) of Spenser are in existence, and at least one miniature. The latter may be dismissed as wholly unsatisfactory. There is nothing of the Elizabethan atmosphere about it, and its subject is a nondescript character wholly out of keeping with the pronounced personality of the author of the "Faerie Queene." The other portraits may be divided into two classes, represented respectively by the canvas at Duplin Castle and that which was formerly in the possession of Lord Chesterfield. It is impossible to reconcile these portraits; they are of men utterly dissimilar; they have absolutely nothing in common. All who have compared them must regard it as little short of a misfortune that the Lord Chesterfield painting is that which has generally been followed in the engraved portraits of the poet; it is hardly less satisfactory than the miniature. On the other hand, the Duplin portrait

LITERARY BY-PATHS

seems to prove its own authenticity. There is an excellent replica of this portrait, from the brush of Sir Henry Raeburn, in the possession of Earl Spencer at Althorp, and the accompanying reproduction of a photograph taken recently from that



EDMUND SPENSER

From the Portrait in the possession of Earl Spencer

canvas may be confidently left to create its own justification as the most reliable likeness of the poet. There is a note on the back of the portrait, which, taken in conjunction with the fact that Raeburn made the copy in 1820, appears to offer inferential evidence in favour of this likeness.

The note is to the following effect: "Another original portrait of this great poet was known to have been at Castle Saffron in the county of Cork, Ireland, situated in the neighbourhood of Kilcolman Castle, the residence of Spenser, which was destroyed by fire before his death. This picture, in consequence of the roof of Castle Saffron falling in from neglect, was utterly destroyed, a fact ascertained by Admiral Sir Benj. Halliwell, during the period of his command in chief of the port of Cork in 1818, at the request of George John Earl Spencer, K.G."

Perhaps the chief evidence for the authenticity of the portrait accompanying these pages is the surprising manner in which it harmonises with the character of Spenser. This, at any rate, is a man of whom the "Faerie Queene" might be expected. There is an aloofness in the expression which may well have mirrored to the outward world the spirit of one who dwelt apart in a "happy land of Faerie."

II

THE HOME OF SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

II

THE HOME OF SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

*“ For a dearer life
Never in battle hath been offered up,
Since in like cause and in unhappy day,
By Zutphen’s walls the peerless Sidney fell.”*

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY is the enigma of the Elizabethan age. His span of life was but a brief thirty-two years, and as the first twenty years of any man’s career are but a preparation for the activities of after-life, Sidney had only twelve years in which to impress himself on English history and win his renown. But they sufficed. After the lapse of more than three centuries his fame shines as brightly in the annals of England as that of Spenser, of Raleigh, of Drake, of Shakespeare, and of other Elizabethan immortals, against whose names there are recorded achievements far surpassing anything Sidney ever accomplished.

As great deeds went in England in the closing half of the sixteenth century, Sidney did nothing

LITERARY BY-PATHS

great. He made the grand tour as a recognised necessary part of a liberal education in those days ; he was sent to Vienna on a small embassy of condolence ; he was appointed cup-bearer to Queen Elizabeth ; he addressed a surprisingly bold epistle to his sovereign in opposition to her contemplated marriage with the Duke of Anjou ; and, finally, as Earl Leicester's companion, he was named Governor of Flushing. This record, even with his literary work thrown in, offers no explanation of the persistence of Sidney's fame. He lives, really, by the heroism of his death, and that heroism was the natural flower of his rare character, and that character was moulded into its fine quality by a wise father and a tender mother in Sidney's happy boyhood days at Penshurst.

When Musidorus, escaped from shipwreck, accompanied his two shepherd friends to the house of Kalender in Arcadia, he found himself in the presence of a building made "of fair and strong stone, not effecting so much any extraordinary kind of fineness as an honorable presenting of a firm stateliness. The lights, doors, and stairs rather directed to the use of the guest than to the eye of the artificer, and yet as the one chiefly heeded so the other not neglected ; each place

IN OLD ENGLAND

handsome without loathsomeness ; not so dainty as not to be trod on, nor yet slubberd up with good fellow-ships ; all more lasting than beautiful



PENSHURST VILLAGE

but that the consideration of the exceeding lastingness made the eye believe it was exceedingly beautiful. The back side of the house was neither field, garden, nor orchard, or rather it was both field, garden, and orchard, for as soon as the de-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

scending of the stairs had delivered them (that is, Musidorus and Kalender) down they came into a place cunningly set with trees of the most taste-pleasing fruits ; but scarcely had they taken that into their consideration but that they were suddenly stepped into a delicate green thicket, and behind the thickets again new beds of flowers, which being underneath the trees were to them a pavilion, and they were to the trees a mosaical floor, so that it seemed that that art therein would needs be delighted by counterfeiting his enemy error and making order in confusion. In the midst of all the place was a fair pond, whose shaking crystal was a perfect mirror to all the other beauties, so that it bare show of two gardens, one in deed the other in shadows."

So wrote Sidney in the "Arcadia," and the model he had in mind was undoubtedly that stately Penshurst home in which he had his birth.

In all the fair county of Kent there is probably no more picturesque village than Penshurst. Its beauty is that of the past. Modernity has no footing here. Elizabethan types are renewed in an Edwardian age. As the daisy of to-day fashions itself by unerring heredity into the likeness of the daisy of five centuries ago, so the

IN OLD ENGLAND

Penshurst cottage homes of the twentieth century perpetuate the semblance of those village homes which clustered about the mansion of the Sidneys in the sixteenth century. Example and authority account for this persistence of type. The example is there in the quaint half-timbered dwellings of the fifteenth century which overhang the pathway that gives entrance to the quiet churchyard ; the authority, in the wise determination of the lord of the manor that any old building which has become unfit for habitation shall be replaced by one bearing exact likeness to that it has displaced. Thus the newest houses look as ancient as the oldest.

Penshurst Place is not exempt from this rule which enforces continuity with the past. Although various additions have been made to the mansion, the harmony of its outward semblance is undisturbed. Between the old banqueting hall of the fourteenth century and the new wing of the nineteenth century there is no discord ; loyalty to the past has shaped every new stone and fitted it so deftly into its place that even the old builders themselves would be deceived could they revisit the work of their hands.

Although Penshurst has been the residence of a noble family almost from the time of the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Norman Conquest, it was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that it became the home of the Sidneys. It was to Sir William Sidney, a great favourite and faithful servant of Henry VIII, that Edward VI, in the year of his death, granted the manor of Penshurst. But



PENSHURST PLACE

Sir William had brief enjoyment of the gift, dying as he did in the year in which he received it. His son, Sir Henry Sidney, the father of Philip, succeeded, and he, in 1585, erected the tower which now forms the central feature of the north front. Over the gateway of this tower is still to be seen a stone tablet bearing an inscription which reads thus :

IN OLD ENGLAND

“The most religious and renowned Prince Edward the Sixth, Kinge of England, France and Ireland, gave this house of Pencester with the mannors, landes and appurtences thereunto belongings, unto his trustye and well-beloved servant, Syr William Sidney, Knight Bannaret, servinge him from the tyme of his birth unto his coronation, in the offices of chamberlayne and stuarde of his household, in commemoration of which most worthie and famous Kinge, Sir Henry Sidney, Knight of the most noble order of the garter, Lord President of the Council established in the Marches of Wales, sonne and heyre of the afore named Syr William Sidney, caused this tower to be buylded and that most excellent Prince’s arms to be errected anno domino 1585.”

Other additions to Penshurst owe their existence to Sir Henry Sidney, but it is his greatest glory that here he moulded the character of his illustrious son, Philip. The room in which he was born on November 29, 1554, is still pointed out, and scattered through the house are portraits and relics which serve the imagination liberally in its pleasant task of picturing the image of this noble youth. Among the family manuscripts is

LITERARY BY-PATHS

one document which goes far towards explaining how he became what we know him to have been. This is the first letter ever written by Sir Henry to his son, then at school at Shrewsbury, England, and as the lapse of three centuries has not rendered its advice obsolete nor its spirit less worthy of imitation, it may be quoted almost in full. After acknowledging the receipt of two letters from his son, one in Latin and the other in French, Sir Henry proceeds :

“Since this is my first letter that ever I did write to you, I will not that it be all empty of some advices, which my natural care for you provoketh me to wish you to follow, as documents to you in this your tender age. Let your first action be the lifting of your mind to Almighty God by hearty prayer ; and feelingly digest the words you speak in prayer, with continued meditation and thinking of Him to whom you pray and of the matter for which you pray. And use this as an ordinary act, and at an ordinary hour, whereby the time itself shall put you in remembrance to do that which you are accustomed to do in that time. Apply your study to such hours as your discreet master doth assign you, earnestly ; and the time I know he will so limit

IN OLD ENGLAND

as shall be both sufficient for your learning and safe for your health. And mark the sense of the matter of that you read, as well as the words. So shall you both enrich your tongue with words and your wit with matter; and judgment will grow as years groweth in you. Be humble and obedient to your master for unless you frame yourself to obey others, yea, and feel in yourself what obedience is, you shall never be able to teach others how to obey you. Be courteous of gesture and affable to all men, with diversity of reverence according to the dignity of the person: there is nothing that winneth so much with so little cost. Use moderate diet, so as after your meal you may find your wit fresher and not duller, and your body more lively and not more heavy. Seldom drink wine, and yet sometimes do, lest being enforced to drink upon the sudden you should find yourself inflamed. Use exercise of body yet such as is without peril of your joints and bones, it will increase your force and enlarge your breath. Delight to be cleanly, as well in all parts of your body as in your garments: it shall make you grateful in each company, and otherwise loathsome. Give yourself to be merry for you degenerate from your father if you find not yourself most able in wit and

LITERARY BY-PATHS

body and to do anything when you be most merry ; but let your mirth be ever void of all scurrility and biting words to any man, for a wound given by a word is often-times harder to be cured than that which is given with the sword. . . . Think upon every word that you will speak before you utter it, and remember how nature hath ramparted up, as it were, the tongue with teeth, lips, yea, and hair without the lips, and all betokening reins or bridles for the loose use of that member. Above all things tell no untruth ; even, in trifles : the custom of it is naughty. . . . Remember, my son, the noble blood you are descended of, by your mother's side ; and think that only by virtuous life and good action you may be an ornament to that illustrious family, and otherwise, through vice and sloth you shall be counted 'labes generis,' one of the greatest curses that can happen to man."

To this notable letter, Philip's mother, Lady Mary Sidney, added a postscript which is as remarkable for its loving reverence for her husband as for its affectionate solicitude for her son. Letter and postscript, reflecting as in a mirror the characters of Sir Henry and Lady Sidney, explain the high abstracted life of their son and

IN OLD ENGLAND

give us the clue to the heroism of his death. It is easy to imagine the days of his boyhood at Penshurst. Ever before him was the image of parents who never faltered in their love for each other and were never divided in the authority with which they shaped the lives of their children. Yet that authority was far removed from austerity. Firm it doubtless was, but loving, and seasoned with innocent mirth. Nothing of good repute was lacking in the childhood environment of Philip Sidney; from his earliest days he breathed the atmosphere of a home where all that tended to make life joyous and strong had free entrance.

Whether roaming about the park or through the spacious rooms of this old-world mansion, the visitor is ever confronted with memorials of an age of men long passed away. When Philip Sidney was born, an oak was planted in the park to celebrate the coming of Sir Henry's heir, and Ben Jonson, in his day, could describe it as

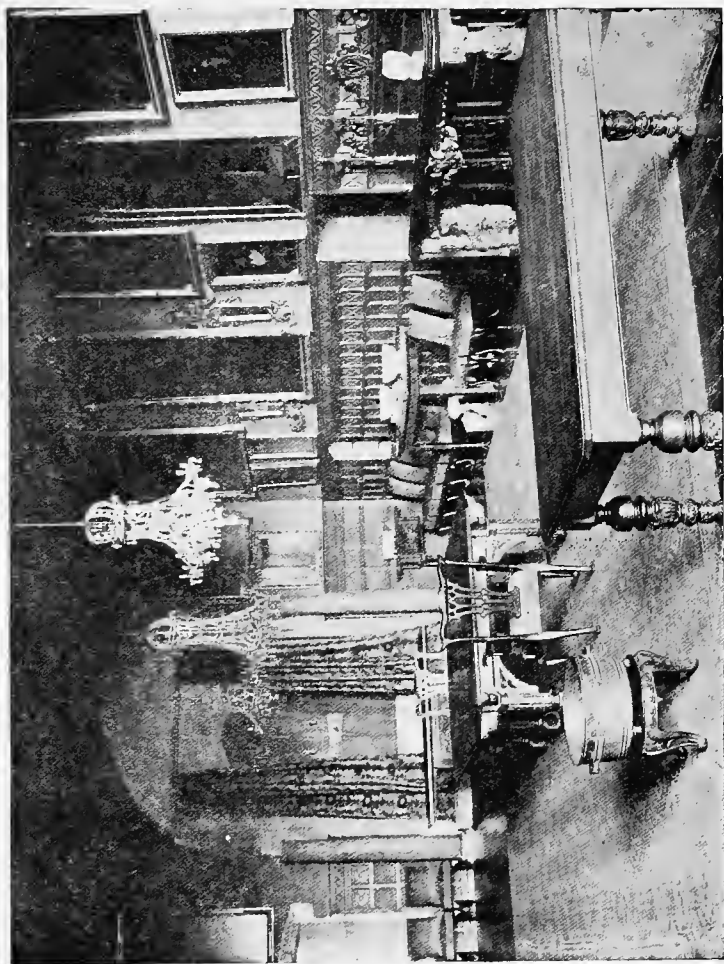
“That taller tree which of a truth was set
At his great birth, when all the muses met.”

That birthday tree is gone; it was cut down in 1768; but there still exists the “Sidney Oak,” a veteran of many centuries, in whose shadow Philip often sat while framing his own verse or

LITERARY BY-PATHS

discussing with Spenser the stanzas of the "Shepherds Calender" or the scheme of the "Faerie Queene." For when Spenser returned to London after his sojourn in the north of England on the completion of his college days at Cambridge, and was casting about for an occupation in life, he was the guest of Sidney at Penshurst, and there saw in tangible flesh the high-souled man who became for him the ideal of a perfect knight and gentleman. It was at Penshurst, there is every reason for believing, that Spenser prepared his "Shepherds Calender" for the press, and his companionship with Sidney there accounts for his issuing that work under the shelter of a dedication to his "noble and virtuous" host. It accounts, too, for Sidney figuring so largely in the little poem with which he prefaced the book.

"Goe, little booke ! thy selfe present,
As child whose parent is unkent,
To him that is the president
Of Noblesse and of chevalree.
And if that Envie barke at thee,
As sure it will, for succoure flee
Under the shadow of his wing ;
And asked who thee forth did bring,
A shepherds swaine, saye, did thee sing
All as his straying flocke he fedde ;
And, when his honor has thee redde,
Crave pardon for my hardyhedde.



PENSHURST PLACE : THE BALLROOM

IN OLD ENGLAND

Among the rich and rare collections of armour adorning the corridors and rooms of the mansion is Sidney's helmet, bearing his familiar porcupine crest, and elsewhere is to be seen a fragment of his shaving-glass, enclosed in a rude frame. Then there are numerous portraits of the hero, in one of which he has for companion his brother Robert, the first Earl of Leicester. Not less interesting are the portraits of his mother, Lady Mary Sidney, and that sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, for whose amusement in the time of her travail with her first-born he wrote his "Arcadia."

Each stately apartment of Penshurst is replete with historical relics. In the ballroom, which is the first to be visited, there is a bushel measure made from gun-metal captured in the fight with the Spanish Armada, and overhead there hang three priceless chandeliers, the gift of Queen Elizabeth to Sir Henry Sidney. It is comforting to know that her Majesty *did* give Sir Henry something, for it is certain that his services on her behalf as Lord President of Wales and Lord Deputy of Ireland made him immensely poorer in worldly goods if they enriched him with honour. But it is probable that those chandeliers were much more than paid for by the hospitality Elizabeth received on her visit to Penshurst. The

LITERARY BY-PATHS

apartment next to the ballroom is still known as Queen Elizabeth's Room, and here may yet be seen the suite of furniture made specially in honour of her visit and for her use. Her arm-chair is in the centre of the apartment, and by the aid of a portrait on the wall it is easy to recall the figure of the Virgin Queen and seat her once more in its capacious depths. Close by stands the card-table for which Elizabeth worked the embroidered top, and in front of that is the black velvet stool upon which Queen Victoria knelt at her coronation in Westminster Abbey. Other royal relics may be sought in the tiny Pages' Closet which opens off the Tapestry Room. This small chamber has now become the storeroom for the family china, and here are preserved Queen Elizabeth's dessert service and Queen Anne's breakfast set. The dessert service has for its ground color a lovely shade of green such as is not seen in modern china, and the breakfast set of Anne is of exquisite blue and white porcelain.

In the picture gallery, a noble apartment ninety feet in length, are sufficient objects of *virtu* to make the fame of two or three museums. Side by side may be seen a quaint old clock with a horizontal brass face and a curious old lamp which was intended to measure time rather than



PENSHURST PLACE: THE PICTURE GALLERY

IN OLD ENGLAND

shed light. At the opposite ends of the widened recess are two costly cabinets, and near one of these is a richly decorated spinet which was made in Rome in 1680 for Christina, Queen of Sweden. In this room, too, are a pair of riding-boots which belonged to Algernon Sidney, that premature republican who lost his head on the testimony of a book he had written but had not published.

Penshurst has gathered other interesting associations than those immediately concerned with Sir Philip Sidney. Ben Jonson was a frequent visitor here, and his visits have left their impress on his verse. In "The Forest," for example, there occurs a lengthy description of Penshurst, in the midst of which we happen upon a pleasing picture of the kindly relationship which existed between its noble owners and the retainers of the estate.

" And though thy walls be of the country stone,
They 're reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan;
There's none that dwell about them wish them down.
But all come in, the farmer and the clown,
And no one empty-handed to salute
Thy lord and lady, though they have no suit.
Some bring a capon, some a rural cake,
Some nuts, some apples, some think they make
The better cheeses, bring them ; or else send
By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
This way to husbands, and whose baskets bear
An emblem of themselves in plum or pear."

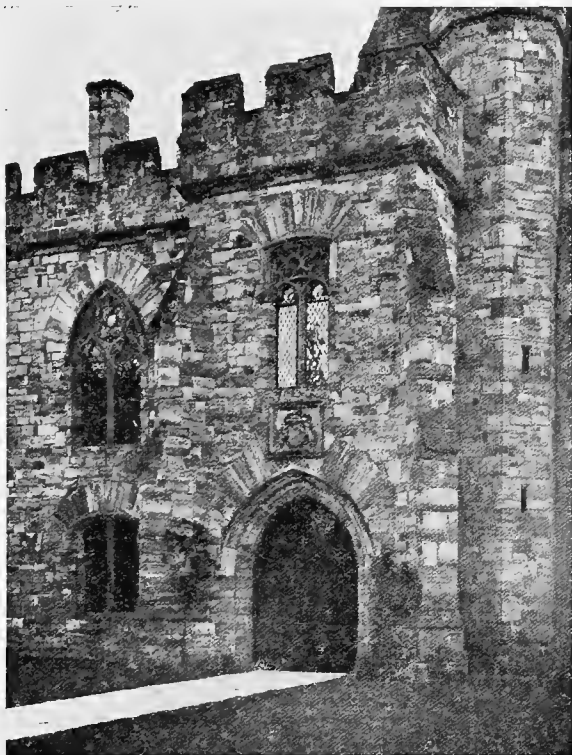
LITERARY BY-PATHS

Nor should Algernon Sidney be forgotten. Next to Sir Philip he is the best known member of his famous house. Even in his youth he was credited with a "huge deal of wit and much sweetness of nature." Among the stanchest of his friends was William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, and it was at Penshurst the two drew up between them the fundamental articles of the Pennsylvania constitution. He had bitter experience of the gratitude of kings. Two of Charles's children found a haven at Penshurst when the fortunes of the Royal house were wrecked by the Commonwealth, and a third, Charles II, rewarded the brutal Judge Jeffreys with a costly ring for his services at the mock trial which sent Algernon to the scaffold!

One other memory links itself with Penshurst, and this time it is a woman's fair form that fills the imagination. Algernon Sidney had a sister named Dorothy, and it was her fate to awaken a passionate love in the heart of Edmund Waller. He wooed her with all a poet's intensity, and bent his muse to the service of his desire. Penshurst and his poems perpetuate his passion to this day. In the affected language of the seventeenth century, he christened his ideal with the name of

IN OLD ENGLAND

Saccharissa, and Lady Dorothy Sidney has lost her title in her lover's endearing epithet. Over



SACCHARISSA'S SITTING-ROOM

the gateway of the inner courtyard is the window of "Saccharissa's Sitting-room," and the stately avenue of lofty beeches by which the mansion is

LITERARY BY-PATHS

approached from the east is known as “Saccharissa’s Walk.” It is to that avenue Waller alludes in the following lines :



SACCHARISSA’S WALK

“ Ye lofty beeches, tell this matchless dame,
That if together ye fed all one flame,
It would not equalize the hundredth part
Of what her eyes have kindled in my heart !

IN OLD ENGLAND

Go, boy, and carve this passion on the bark
Of yonder tree, which stands the sacred mark
Of noble Sidney's birth ; and when such benign,
Such more than mortal-making stars did shine ;
That there they cannot but for ever prove
The monument and pledge of humble love :
His humble love, whose hope shall ne'er rise higher,
Than for a pardon that he dares admire."

It was all in vain. Neither Waller's bold hyperbole nor his pretence of humility had any power over Saccharissa's heart. She looked for a higher social status than Waller could give, and eventually became the Countess of Sunderland. But Waller had his revenge. When Saccharissa had lost both her husband and her youth, she, on meeting the poet, thoughtlessly asked when he would again write such verses upon her. "When," replied he, "you are as young, Madam, and as handsome as you were then."

III

MEMORIALS OF WILLIAM PENN

III

MEMORIALS OF WILLIAM PENN

"It should be sufficient for the glory of William Penn, that he stands upon record as the most humane, the most moderate, and the most pacific of all rulers."

LORD JEFFREY.

DEEP in a shady dell, about a mile and a half from that village of Chalfont St. Giles in which Milton took refuge when the plague was raging in London, stands the Quaker meeting-house of Jordans. Living or dead, no member of the Society of Friends could wish to find himself in a spot more in harmony with the simple tenets of his creed. As the meeting-house breaks upon the vision through the stately trees by which it is surrounded, it seems as if one had been vouchsafed a glimpse of New England in Old England; it is just such a building as was common in the New World what time the religious refugees of Britain, late in the seventeenth century, crossed the seas in search of that liberty of conscience denied them in the old home. On such rude wooden benches as still

LITERARY BY-PATHS

remain under that red-tiled roof, no rule of life and faith would be more seemly than that preached by George Fox ; and than that simple God's acre which fronts the meeting-house there could be no fitter resting-place in which to await in quiet confidence that Day which will prove how far that creed was in harmony with absolute truth.

For several miles around, this district is rich in memories of the early Quakers. Near by was the peaceful home of the Penningtons, in which Thomas Ellwood was living as tutor, and from which William Penn was to take his first and most beloved wife. General Fleetwood, too, had his residence in the neighbourhood. The reason for this focussing of so many Friends within a small area was probably the same as that which drove the Covenanters of Scotland to seek refuge on the lonely moors ; to-day Jordans is sufficiently inaccessible, and two centuries ago it must have been an ideal haven for suspected sectaries.

More than two hundred years have elapsed since Jordans passed into the possession of the Society of Friends. It owes its name probably to a forgotten owner of the property ; for it was not from a Jordan, but from one William Rus-

IN OLD ENGLAND

sell, that, in 1671, Thomas Ellwood and several others acquired the land in behalf of the Society. The idea of a meeting-house seems to have been an after-thought; it was as a burial-place simply that Jordans was originally purchased. But the



CHURCH OF ALL HALLOWS BARKING, LONDON, WHERE WILLIAM PENN WAS BAPTISED

meeting-house was not long in following, for seventeen years later there is authentic record of its existence. Probably some generations have passed since regular meetings were held in this rude temple; but twice every year — on the fourth Sunday in May and the first Thursday in June — set gatherings are held to

LITERARY BY-PATHS

keep alive the continuity of Quaker teaching within these walls.

But it is because of its graves, and not on account of its meeting-house, that Jordans attracts so many pilgrims year by year. For a century and a half there was nothing to distinguish one mouldering heap from another. Here, for example, is the account which Mr. William Hepworth Dixon, one of Penn's most competent biographers, wrote of his visit to the place in 1851: "Nothing could be less imposing than the graveyard at Jordans: the meeting-house is like an old barn in appearance, and the field in which the illustrious dead repose is not even decently smoothed. There are no gravel walks, no monuments, no mournful yews, no cheerful flowers; there is not even a stone to mark a spot or to record a name. When I visited it with my friend Granville Penn, Esq., great-grandson of the State-Founder, on the 11th of January this year, we had some difficulty in determining the heap under which the great man's ashes lie. Mistakes have occurred before now; and for many years pilgrims were shown the wrong grave!"

With the laudable desire of helping pilgrims to pay their devotions at the right shrine, Mr.

IN OLD ENGLAND

Dixon prepared a simple ground-plan of the graveyard, and the positions of the small headstones which mark the graves to-day correspond with that plan to a large extent. But there is one important exception. It will be seen from



JORDANS MEETING-HOUSE

one of the pictures that the stone nearest to the fence in the second row bears the name of "John Penn," whereas in Mr. Dixon's plan that position marks the grave of "John Pennington." It is not easy to throw any light on this mistake. For instance, it is difficult to see what John Penn could be buried under the date given,

LITERARY BY-PATHS

1746 ; certainly not the grandson who occupied Stoke Park and was responsible, in 1799, for that ponderous cenotaph to the memory of Gray. The grave is undoubtedly more likely to be that of a Pennington, a member of the family to which William Penn's first wife belonged. The mystery about this particular grave makes all the more unmeaning the attempt to desecrate it, which occurred some time back.

It lends a pathetic interest to this lonely graveyard to visit it fresh from a perusal of Thomas Ellwood's simple autobiography. All those who sleep so quietly under these modest headstones figure more or less in his pages ; they become known to us in all their quaint Quaker habits and beliefs, and appeal to us with the tender sentiment of a bygone age. Penn had two wives and eleven children, of whom both wives and seven of the children keep him company here.

Next to Penn himself, the memory which most dominates this burial-place is that of Guli Penn, his first wife. Ellwood knew her in London as a child ; became her playfellow ; used to "ride with her in her little coach, drawn by her footman about Lincoln's Inn Fields." She was the daughter of Sir William Springett,

IN OLD ENGLAND

who fell in Cromwell's army, and her mother afterwards became the wife of Isaac Pennington. Other children were born to Isaac Pennington and Lady Springett, and as tutor to those children Ellwood was for many years in



INTERIOR OF JORDANS MEETING-HOUSE

daily converse with Guli Springett. He had an ample opportunity, then, to win her for his own; and he was not "so stupid nor so divested of all humanity as not to be sensible of the real and innate worth and virtue which adorned that excellent dame." Outsiders talked, of course. Ellwood had not joined the Quakers

LITERARY BY-PATHS

for nothing; his motive was the conquest of Guli and the annexation of her fortune; if he could not get her by fair means, why then, of course, he would run away with her and marry her. Such pleasant gossip reached the ears of the Penningtons and their tutor; but the former did not lose confidence and the latter did not pluck up courage to make the gossip true. For Guli Springett was worth winning. "In all respects," says the meek Ellwood, "a very desirable woman — whether regard was had to her outward person, which wanted nothing to render her completely comely; or to the endowments of her mind, which were every way extraordinary and highly obliging; or to her outward fortune, which was fair." Ellwood's subsequent wooing showed that he did not deserve such a prize. Guli did not lack for suitors; but towards them all, "till he at length came for whom she was reserved, she carried herself with so much evenness of temper, such courteous freedom guarded with the strictest modesty, that, as it gave encouragement or ground of hopes to none, so neither did it administer any matter of offence or just cause of complaint to any." The "he" for whom she was "reserved" was William Penn. Happening

IN OLD ENGLAND

to visit Ellwood at the Penningtons, he saw, was enslaved, and then conquered. Twenty-two years of wedded happiness were meted out to these two, and then Guli Penn was laid to rest at Jordans.

Perhaps it spoils something of the romance that Penn took a second wife, even though it is always affirmed that Guli ever remained his favourite spouse. Was Hannah Callowhill conscious of that fact? Those lovers of Guli Penn who are knights-errant of her memory will perhaps wickedly hope that she was. This second wife, at any rate, has left little impress in the life of her husband; that she bore him six children and that from one of her sons the present representatives of the male branch of the family are descended is about all that has to be recorded. If the testimony of the headstone must be accepted, — and there are doubts on that point, — then Hannah Penn lies in the same grave with her husband, while the lovable Guli sleeps apart by herself in the grave to the left. Next to her is her mother, inscribed on the headstone simply as “Mary Pennington” and not as Lady Springett. She appears to have put off her title with her widow’s weeds; and in any case such “worldly” honours can hardly expect

LITERARY BY-PATHS

perpetuation in a Quaker graveyard. And yet a letter among the manuscripts of the Duke of Portland proves that Penn himself was not wholly indifferent to the fascination of sounding titles. He is writing to Robert Harley on matters connected with Pennsylvania, and he weakly confesses that he asked for "some honorary mark, as a founder of the colony, viz., as the first — hereditary — Privy Councillor or Chief Justice, or the like, which I shall not insist upon, contenting myself with the rights of landlord and lord of the manor of the country."

Isaac Pennington finds sepulture here too, and Penn's married daughter Letitia, and his first-born son Springett, and five of his infant children, and Ellwood, and that wife of his whom he wooed in such a comically serious fashion. It is quite a reunion of the pugnacious men and the demure women who stand in such marked contrast with each other in the memory of those familiar with Ellwood's pages. Peace to their memory, these controversial men, these mild-mannered women! Perhaps they would not sleep so peacefully could they be conscious of the changes which have come over those who hold their creed to-day. Not to hear the "thee" and "thou," not to see the hat-covered head, —

IN OLD ENGLAND

what pain this would be, especially to the obstinate Ellwood, whose father once threatened to knock the teeth down his throat if he "thee-ed" him again, and buffeted him about the head for persisting in wearing a hat in his presence! Poor Ellwood! Hat after hat was filched from him



GRAVES OF PENN AND HIS WIVES AT JORDANS

by that irate father; and when at last even his montero-cap was confiscated, and he was forced to go bareheaded, he caught such a cold in his face that his devoted sister had much ado to keep him poulticed with "figs and stoned raisins roasted." No doubt there are many cheaper martyrdoms than that.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Philadelphia often casts envious eyes towards the graveyard at Jordans. Is that Mr. Hepworth Dixon's fault? In that account of his visit to Jordans, quoted above, he mentions Mr. Granville Penn's resolve to erect some simple but durable record over the graves, and then adds: "If this be not done, the neglect will only hasten the day on which his ancestor's remains will be carried off to America—their proper and inevitable home!" Dr. Dixon forgot that there must be two parties to such a bargain. Philadelphia did try to remove the remains some years ago; but the trustees of the burial-ground objected, and the Home Secretary at once upheld the objection. And now a Philadelphian makes another suggestion. He wants a memorial to Penn erected near the Old Bailey in London—the scene of his vindication of the right of a jury to render a verdict contrary to the dictation of a judge—and the ashes of the famous Quaker placed underneath. The suggestion calls up two pictures. One is of a grimy street in the heart of London, where the roar of traffic resounds from dawning day to past midnight, where stands the sombre building whose walls are fetid with the stains of inhuman crimes; the other is of a grassy dell sentinelled with bosky trees, where a soft quietness broods through win-

IN OLD ENGLAND

ter snows and summer sun, where there is little to suggest the depth of infamy to which the human heart can sink. What honour would it be to Penn to transplant his bones from Jordans to the Old Bailey? Then there is Guli Penn, too, — shall that gentle spirit be ruthlessly bereaved? Let them all sleep quietly on, these Quaker friends and lovers, till He shall waken them whose they are and whom they served.

IV

THE BIRTHPLACE OF GRAY'S ELEGY

IV

THE BIRTHPLACE OF GRAY'S ELEGY

*"No, bard divine ! For many a care beguil'd
By the sweet magic of thy soothing lay,
For many a raptur'd thought, and vision wild,
To thee this strain of gratitude I pay."*

THOMAS WARTON.

GRAY'S "Elegy" is *the* Elegy of the English-speaking race. All its most outstanding qualities are native to the sea-girt isle in which that race had its origin. Many words and phrases in the poem only convey the full power of their emotion to the mind which can interpret them in the light and knowledge of English history and English rural life. The word "curfew" strikes a note mellow with memories of ages long gone by, and attunes the spirit to that pleasant melancholy which is the most profitable mood in which to read the poem. That "glimmering landscape" too, that "weary ploughman," that "drowsy tinkling" of the unseen sheep, that "moping owl" complaining from the church's ivy-mantled tower, — all these things are English to the core. It is

LITERARY BY-PATHS

not difficult to understand why this "Elegy" holds its place of supreme honour among the people to whom it belongs. "It is a poem," writes Mr. Swinburne, "of such high perfection and such universal appeal to the tenderest and noblest depths of human feeling ;" and the same writer asserts that "as an elegiac poet, Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station."

When the eye of sense falls for the first time upon a scene hitherto beheld only by the eye of imagination, there often comes a painful feeling of disenchantment, an enevitable dispelling of much of the romance which gathered round the spot while it was still unseen. For the great majority, the churchyard in which Gray wrote his "Elegy" has its abode in the realm of fancy — how does it suffer by the critical test of coming within range of the seeing eye? Frankly, let it be confessed that it suffers surprisingly little. It is true that the painful uniformity and glaring whiteness of the modern marble memorial stones which are becoming too plentiful jar upon the old-time sentiment with which the pilgrim approaches this shrine, but these unlovely emblems of departed worth and surviving grief are happily removed a little distance from the church, and thus



STOKE POGES CHURCH

IN OLD ENGLAND

it happens that the older tombs preserve around the immediate vicinity of the building a scene which harmonises with the verse of Gray because it can have changed but little since his time. It is just such a scene as most imaginations would have pictured. Each object is easily recognised by the poet's description, and yet no one object is so sharp in outline as to remove it altogether from the sphere of imagination. The only probable exception is the "ivy-mantled tower." The tower itself is in perfect harmony with the



STOKE POGES CHURCHYARD

"Elegy," and its thickly clustered ivy still provides a secret bower for the descendants of the poet's "moping owl;" but the wooden spire which rises from its battlements seems to strike a note of discord. For the rest, all is as it should be. Each picture in the poem has its faithful counterpart; the eyewitnesses to the fidelity with which the poet has caught the inner likeness of the mute objects which sat for the models of his immortal canvas. To the south a line of "rugged elms" stands

LITERARY BY-PATHS

guard by the churchyard wall, and in the summer sun their shadows mingle with the yew-tree's shade, beneath which,

“ Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.”

If the fates were unkind to Gray in the father they gave him, the balance was generously readjusted in the person of his mother. Philip Gray, the father of the poet, is not to be credited with any share in his famous son's achievements ; all that we have to thank him for is a portrait of that son in his thirteenth year. He was a man of violent temper, extravagant in his habits, wholly wanting in his duty to his family, and so inhuman in his behaviour to his wife that that lady was actually dependent during the whole of her married life upon the labour of her own hands. The darkness of the father's character serves as an excellent foil to throw that of the mother into relief. In a double sense Gray owed his life to her, for when he was still an infant she, finding the child in a fit, resorted to the desperate remedy of opening one of his veins with a pair of scissors, and so saved him from the early grave which her other eleven children found. Through all the following years she watched with tender solicitude the life of the one child who was the sole harvest

of her travail, and when he was sent to Eton it was at her expense and not that of his father.

To his mother, too, Gray owed his acquaintance with that lovely English county from which he was to gather the sweet pastoral images of his most famous poem. Although when Miss Dorothy Antrobus became the wife of Philip Gray she was keeping a milliner's shop in Cornhill, London, in partnership with her sister Mary, she still retained an affectionate connection with Buckinghamshire, the county of her birth, one of her sisters being married to a prosperous lawyer who lived at Burnham. In the house of this uncle Gray spent his vacations from Eton, and thus began his acquaintance with the neighbouring parish of Stoke Poges and with that churchyard which was to have such a profound influence on his verse. Here also he discovered that forest of Arden which, by the name of Burnham Beeches, is now famous among all English-speaking people. "I have," he wrote in a vacation letter to Horace Walpole, "at the distance of half a mile, through a green lane, a forest (the vulgar call it a common) all my own, at least, as good as, for I spy no human thing in it but myself. It is a little chaos of mountains and precipices, — mountains, it is true, that do not ascend

LITERARY BY-PATHS

much above the clouds, nor are the declivities quite so amazing as Dover Cliff, but just such hills as people who love their necks as much as I do may venture to climb, and crags that give the eye as much pleasure as if they were most dangerous. Both vale and hill are covered with venerable beeches, and other very reverend vegetables, that, like most other ancient people, are always dreaming out their old stories to the winds. At the foot of one of these squats *Me* (*il penseroso*) and there I grow to the trunk for a whole morning."

Death was the chief cause of Gray becoming more intimately acquainted with Stoke Poges than had been possible during his Eton vacations. When Philip Gray died in 1741, Dorothy Gray and her sister Mary doubtless realised that one of the strongest ties which held them to the metropolis had snapped, and when, about a year later, their sister in Buckinghamshire became a widow, the three ladies apparently resolved to end their days together in the county of their birth. Henceforward, — that is, from October, 1742, — Gray had no home in London, but there was always open to him the peaceful haven which his mother and her two sisters had shaped for themselves at Stoke Poges. The house was

IN OLD ENGLAND

situated at West End, in the northern part of the parish, where the present mansion of Stoke Court now stands. It is described as having



STOKE COURT

been a simple farmhouse of two stories, with a rustic porch before the door, but the only apartments which survive from the old building are the poet's bedroom, the study, and the window above at which he used to sit. There yet exists

LITERARY BY-PATHS

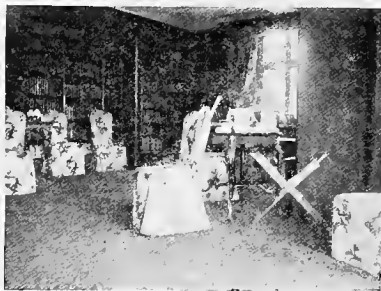
at Stoke Court, however, a still more interesting relic of the poet, in



GRAY'S BEDROOM

the summer-house in which he "used to sit and muse." It is a substantial stone-built structure, embowered in trees, and commanding from the rising ground on which

it stands a far-reaching view of the surrounding country. Than this peaceful retreat it would be difficult to imagine a spot more in harmony with the pensive muse of Gray. As in the case of Wordsworth, it may well have been that while the poet's books were to be found indoors, this summer-house was his study. Here,



GRAY'S STUDY

doubtless, the poet penned many of those lines which were to attain an unfailing immortality. The outlook is still as calm and remote from the busy stir as when Gray described him-



GRAY'S SUMMER-HOUSE

self as "still at Stoke, hearing, seeing, doing absolutely nothing."

As death was instrumental in deepening Gray's intimacy with Stoke Poges, so also was the king of terrors responsible for creating in him that spirit of melancholy out of which the "Elegy" grew. One of the poet's dearest friends at Eton had been Richard West, who was denied any considerable span of life in which to ripen his undoubted genius. While on a visit to Stoke, Gray heard suddenly of the death of this early friend, and the loss tinged all his after life with sadness. The immediate issue of that loss may be traced in the poems written while his sorrow was still heavy upon him. One of these is the sonnet specially dedicated to West's memory.

"In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
 And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire ;
 The birds in vain their amorous descant join ;
 Or cheerful fields resume their green attire ;
 These ears, alas ! for other notes repine,
 A different object do these eyes require ;
 My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine ;
 And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
 Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
 And new-born pleasure brings to happier men ;
 The fields to all their wonted tribute bear ;
 To warm their little loves the birds complain ;
 I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
 And weep the more because I weep in vain."

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Then there is the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," the whole of which is suffused with that retrospective tenderness which is the dominant mood of the human mind under the influence of death. On the southern horizon seen from Stoke Poges the embattled outline of the Royal Castle of Windsor and the "antique towers" of Eton are plainly visible, and as Gray gazed upon these familiar objects while still in the throes of his lonely anguish, what was more natural than that his mind should revert to those lost days of his boyhood which he had spent there in the company of West?

"Ah happy hills ! ah pleasing shade !
Ah fields beloved in vain !
Where once my careless childhood stray'd,
A stranger yet to pain !
I feel the gales that from ye blow
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing
My weary soul they seem to soothe,
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breath a second spring."

Verses such as these are sufficient evidence of the sombre mood of Gray's spirit during that sad autumn of 1742; his muse was surely ripening towards the full harvest of the "Elegy." One other event helping towards that fruition was to

IN OLD ENGLAND

happen that autumn, and this was the death of that lawyer uncle in whose home the poet had spent so many of his holidays from Eton. Twice, thus, within a few short months the shadow of death fell upon Gray's life, and in the gloom of those days "melancholy marked him for her own," and awakened the beginnings of that "Elegy" which was to give the English mind its most comforting channel of expression in any twilight hour.

Although begun as the year 1742 waned to its close, the "Elegy" was not to be finished for a long time. It may be that Gray in the new life at Cambridge upon which he now entered found some relief from the mood in which the poem had its birth; in any case, it was not until death was to touch him again nearly, in the person of one whom he loved, that the "Elegy" was fashioned to its completion. In November, 1749, news reached Gray at Cambridge that his aunt Mary — she who had been partner in the milliner's shop at Cornhill — had died suddenly, and he at once addressed to his mother the following tender-spirited letter: "The unhappy news I have just received from you equally surprises and afflicts me. I have lost a person I loved very much, and have been used to from my infancy,

but am much more concerned for your loss, the circumstances of which I forbear to dwell upon, as you must be too sensible of them yourself; and will, I fear, more and more need a consolation that no one can give, except He who had preserved her to you so many years, and at last, when it was His pleasure, has taken her from us to Himself; and perhaps, if we reflect upon what she felt in this life, we may look upon this as an instance of His goodness both to her and to those who loved her. . . . However you may deplore your own loss, yet think that she is at last easy and happy; and has now more occasion to pity us than we her. I hope, and beg, you will support yourself with that resignation we owe to Him, who gave us our being for our good, and who deprives us of it for the same reason. I would have come to you directly, but you do not say whether you desire I should or not; if you do, I beg I may know it, for there is nothing to hinder me, and I am in very good health."

It does not seem clear whether Gray did go to Stoke Poges at this time, but there is no doubt that the death of his aunt revived the mood in which the "Elegy" was begun, and led to its completion. He finished the poem at Stoke in June of the following year, and in sending a

IN OLD ENGLAND

copy to Horace Walpole he wrote, "Having put an end to a thing whose beginning you have seen so long, I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it; a merit that most of my writings have wanted and are likely to want."



"THE YEW-TREE'S SHADE"

It is puerile, in the face of the overwhelming evidence available, to assert, as some have done, that the churchyard of the "Elegy" is not that of Stoke Poges. Even apart from that evidence, the testimony of the poem is conclusive on that point: he who visits Stoke Poges with the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“Elegy” written clearly on the tablets of his memory realises at once that here is the very scene from which its pictures were drawn; he will feel, as Mr. Edmund Gosse has said, “a certain sense of confidence in the poet’s sincerity.” The harmony between the objective sights and



GRAY'S TOMB

the subjective recollections is perfect. The “ivy-mantled tower,” the “rugged elms,” the “yew-tree’s shade,” the frail memorials “with uncouth rhimes and shapeless sculpture decked,” the “church-way path”—these all assert the truthfulness of the poet’s picture, and prove that

IN OLD ENGLAND

it was here and nowhere else he garnered the images of his immortal verse.

In the fulness of time Gray himself was laid to rest in the peaceful graveyard of Stoke Poges, and thus the visitor thither has the added sad pleasure of pausing by the tomb of the poet whose verse was the motive of his pilgrimage. First to be laid in this grave was that aunt whose death he so deeply deplored, and then, four years later, there followed that tender mother to whom he owed so great a debt of affection. The inscription on the tomb, written by Gray, reads thus : " In the vault beneath are deposited, in the hope of a joyful resurrection, the remains of Mary Antrobus. She died unmarried, Nov. 5, 1749, aged 66. In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her. She died March 11, 1753, aged 67." Gray himself died in July, 1771, and in his will he left explicit instructions that his body was to be " deposited in the vault, made by my late dear mother in the churchyard of Stoke Poges, near Slough in Buckinghamshire, by her remains." Of course this wish was respected, but there is no inscription on the tomb

LITERARY BY-PATHS

to show that the poet is buried there. In the wall of the church, however, close by, there is a stone which reads: "Opposite to this stone, in the same tomb upon which he has so feelingly recorded his grief at the loss of a beloved parent,



GRAY'S MONUMENT

are deposited the remains of Thomas Gray, the author of the *Elegy* written in a country churchyard. He was buried August 6th, 1771."

There is, however, a monument to the poet in the field adjoining the churchyard on the east. This takes the form of a massive cenotaph, and upon the four sides of the pedestal there are various inscriptions. Three of these are quota-

IN OLD ENGLAND

tions from the poet's verses ; the fourth records that "This monument, in honour of Thomas Gray, was erected A. D. 1799, among the scenes celebrated by that great Lyric and Elegiac Poet. He died July 31, 1771, and lies unnoted, in the churchyard adjoining, under the tombstone in which he piously and pathetically recorded the interment of his aunt and lamented mother." The cost of this monument, and the stone in the church wall,



STOKE POGES MANOR HOUSE

was generously borne by Mr. John Penn, a grandson of the founder of Pennsylvania. At the time of their erection, and indeed for some thirty years before, Stoke Poges Manor was in the possession of the Penn family. Since that date the property has been in the possession of several owners, but, happily, they have all realised that in many respects they were but the stewards of a heritage in which all lovers of the poet have a rightful share.

One other association of Gray with Stoke Poges has still to be mentioned. Before the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“Elegy” was printed, Horace Walpole appears to have handed it about in manuscript form, and one copy was seen by Lady Cobham, who was then residing at Stoke Poges Manor House. By and by the lady was surprised to find that the author was living in the same parish, and she gladly availed herself of the services of two visitors to secure his acquaintance. These visitors, who were ladies, set off one day across the fields to the farmhouse at West End, and, not finding the poet at home, left such a message as made it compulsory on him to return the call. Out of this incident, and descriptive of it, grew Gray’s humorous poem entitled “A Long Story,” the closing scene of which is laid in the Manor House.

It will be seen, then, how rich is the parish of Stoke Poges in associations with the memory of Gray. From early boyhood to ripe manhood these peaceful fields and lanes often filled his vision and ministered to his pensive spirit the tender balm of nature’s sweetest comfort. Here, too, he experienced that love of kindred which was in part denied him in his own home, spending those “quiet autumn days of every year so peacefully in loving and being loved by those three placid old ladies at Stoke, in a warm atmos-

IN OLD ENGLAND

phere of musk and potpourri." But it is in the quiet churchyard the memory of the poet lives in its greatest intensity. So long as the pathos of lowly life appeals to the heart, so long as there is a soul not wholly lost to the charm of peaceful days spent in the "cool sequester'd vale of life," so long as the tender images of fading day and unavailing reminders of the dead have power to move the spirit — so long will this God's Acre keep green the memory of that poet whose verse abounds with "sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo."



V

GILBERT WHITE'S SELBORNE

V

GILBERT WHITE'S SELBORNE

“ Open the book where you will, it takes you out of doors. In our broiling July weather one can walk out with this genially garrulous Fellow of Oriel, and find refreshment instead of fatigue.”

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

SUCH a village as Selborne opens wide the gates of that world of imagination in which poets dwell. True, there are some signs that the march of humanity has not paused these two hundred years, but they are so few and so tentative that they are unable to strike any effective discord. For the rest, the golden stain of time is over all.

A beech-clad hill rises abruptly some three hundred feet on the south side of the village, and a narrow cleft in the trees gives a peep of the little rural world below. It is a picture of red and brown roofs in a frame of green. From the grey tower of the church comes hour by hour the monition of passing time; and in the pauses of the warning bell there float upwards now and then such sounds of Nature life as were familiar in the far-off days of Chaucer. Nature

LITERARY BY-PATHS

has no chronology, no revolutions. Some of her children have fallen in the battle of life, and left no successors, but those who survive show few visible traces of the flight of time. The song of the nightingale heard among these trees in the twilight to-day is

“ the same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.”

In the one long straggling street of the village we draw nearer the present age ; but not much. Away towards the east a few monstrosities of brick and slate blot the old-time landscape with their hideous straight lines and discordant roofs. “ How nice it would be,” exclaimed an admirer, “ if we had a long row of houses like that ! ” Ruskin's life-work has borne no harvest in that stony soil. But to the west, there, where the road bends towards the old church, stand cottages out of which Anne Hathaway or Master William Shakespeare might step at any moment. Lovingly the weather-stained thatch has grown into harmony with the old walls over which it spreads its mantle, and the roses climb up from beneath to kiss the ancient roof-tree with their blushing petals. “ But thatch is so unhealthy, you know,” suggests a Girtonian hygienist.



COTTAGES IN SELBORNE

IN OLD ENGLAND

Mollycoddles that we moderns are! Even if it were — what then? Life is vastly overrated in these days; too much is done for the survival of the unfittest. But is it? Those heroes who laid the proud Armada low were bred under roofs of thatch.

What walks there are in this old-world village! There are footpaths everywhere, and none of



THE LYTHE

them lead whither Richard Jeffries' footpaths led him — back to a railway station, and so to London. The great iron road is so far away that not even the engine's shriek carries to this quiet dell. There is a meandering valley called "The Lythe," — the village has a vocabulary of its own, — and there is a choice of two paths towards

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the old priory, whither it leads. The one on the left of the valley dips down over a swelling hill, passes through such a wicket-gate as Constable would have loved, winds leisurely on under the shadow of the stately beeches, crosses a meadow or two in luscious grass, strikes into a wild copse, where the bracken and bramble and dog-rose tangle themselves across the footway, and emerges in a field where a prostrate stone coffin is nearly all that remains of the priory which reared its head here five hundred years ago. Yet not quite all. In the corner of the farmhouse garden is a small arbour, bright still with the tiles which sandalled monkish feet pressed in the far-off years. What a gulf yawns between our time and theirs ! But are *we* on the right side of it ?

By the letter of law, Selborne belongs to Lord Selborne, and other landowners ; by the gavel-kind of genius it belongs to Gilbert White. Born here, nurtured here, pastor here, died here, buried here, — such is the record of his simple history. The village is permeated with his presence still ; his footprints may be traced through the length and breadth of the parish.

It is a feasible theory that Selborne itself is responsible for what Gilbert White was and did.

IN OLD ENGLAND

Environment is a persistent moulder of character. "Selborne," says Frank Buckland, "was a big bird-cage in which White himself was enclosed even more than the birds." To-day it is a pilgrimage which only the earnest devotee thinks



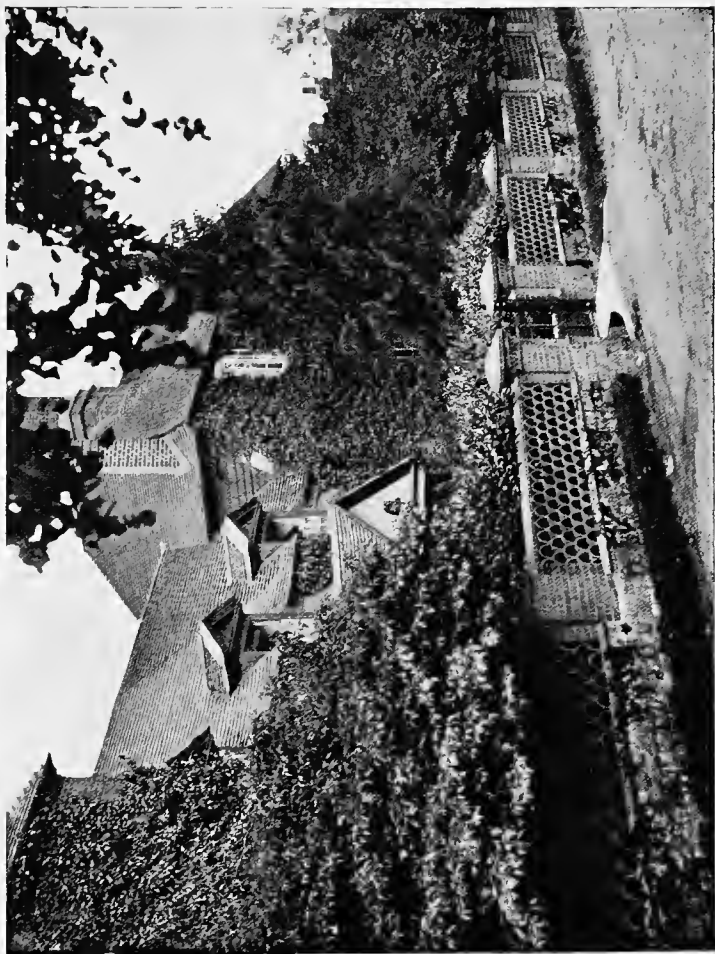
THE PLESTOR

of making ; there are five full miles between it and the nearest railway station. In White's time the village was even more effectually cut off from the outer world. Then the only approach was along those fearsome "hanging lanes," which, disused for many a year, still survive in a wild jungle condition as samples of the roads

LITERARY BY-PATHS

our forefathers traversed. Few were the visitors coming and going ; the inaccessibility of the parish was responsible for it becoming a nest of smugglers. White was driven to seek companionship among the fowls of the air.

Little change has come over Selborne during the hundred-odd years that have passed since Gilbert White's death. From the entrance to the village on the Alton Road to a hundred yards or so east of the house in which he lived, the change would hardly be perceptible even to his keen eye. The old village-green — "vulgarly called the Plestor," says White — is unaltered, save that the sycamore-tree in the centre has increased in girth with advancing years. Gilbert White's house, too, has enlarged its borders and taken on a slightly modern air, yet it is not so refashioned that its former owner would be in danger of passing it even on the darkest night ; many of those cottages in which the curate-naturalist took such excusable pride, remain to shame the twentieth-century spirit with their picturesque harmonies of half timber and thatch ; and the church itself is practically unchanged from the aspect it wore on that July day, more than a century ago, when the beloved pastor of this old-world village was carried through its



GILBERT WHITE'S HOME

IN OLD ENGLAND

porch to his resting-place in the peaceful church-yard.

Gilbert White's house and Gilbert White's church are naturally the chief foci of interest. Most pilgrims will turn to the house first, as being more intimately connected with the personal life of the man whose memory has brought



GILBERT WHITE'S HOUSE FROM THE REAR

them hither. It stands close to the village highway, and its rare picture of blended red-brick and green foliage might have moved the heart of Dr. Johnson to fall in love with rural life. But its chief beauties are hidden from the eyes of the passer-by, and beheld only by those who are favoured with permission to pass through the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

house and inspect it from the grounds in the rear. These grounds are kept with fine taste and skill, and in much the same contour as in



GILBERT WHITE'S SUN-DIAL

White's time. On the farthest verge of the lawn still stands the naturalist's sun-dial; over in the meadow is the shivering aspen he planted; and here on the right is a wall he built, with

IN OLD ENGLAND

"G. W., 1761," still clearly legible on a small tablet embedded among the bricks. Then there is his "favourite walk," a long, narrow pathway of bricks, leading from the house for several hundred feet in the direction of the wooded hill known as "The Hanger." For several years the house has been in the possession of Mr. Parkin, a gentleman who, with rare self-denial, is ever willing to open his doors to the reasonable pilgrim. And this not without having suffered experiences which would have justified him in keeping them tightly shut. While the house was being put into order for the family's incoming, a parson had the ill-grace to lead a party of twenty-five equally boorish companions on a wild romp through the private rooms, and one day a cyclist of fine intelligence rang the bell to ask, "Would you mind my riding my bicycle along Gilbert White's path?" "Yes, I should," promptly replied Mr. Parkin; "and the sooner you ride it off the better pleased I shall be."

One of the principal curiosities of the village owes its existence to Gilbert White. Towards the eastern end of "The Hanger" there is a wide gap in the dense beechen foliage with which the hill is clothed, and here a pathway has been cut up to the summit in the form of a

LITERARY BY-PATHS

continuous row of letter v's laid sideways, thus Δ . It is called "The Zigzag," and White



THE ZIGZAG

refers to its cutting in his third letter to Mr. Thomas Pennant. The path, which had become dangerous, was remade by Mr. Parkin, and at the same time a careful measurement showed

IN OLD ENGLAND

it to be a quarter of a mile in length, equal to three times the distance straight up the hill. Further east still along the village street may be seen a very utilitarian memorial to White.



WISHING STONE ON THE HANGER

On an iron door built into a wall by the roadside there may be read this inscription: "This water supply was given to Selborne by voluntary subscription in memory of Gilbert White,

LITERARY BY-PATHS

1894." From inside that iron door comes the ceaseless thud of the ram by which the water is forced up into the reservoir from which the village is supplied. No one can find fault with



WELL-HEAD

such a practical memorial, but it seems a pity the Selborne people did not give its outward and visible form a more picturesque embodiment.

On the way back to the church let a pause be made at the vicarage, where the Rev. Arthur

IN OLD ENGLAND

Kaye will produce the old parish register in which White made so many entries. If it is opened in the middle of the year 1793, it will reveal the page which has been reproduced by the camera. This

page will serve as well as any to illustrate the clear, honest penmanship of the naturalist, and it possesses the additional interest of bearing the record of his own death and burial. Moreover, it corrects a blunder common with most writers about White. By the majority he is described as "Vicar" of Selborne, but his own off-repeated signature shows that he was never more than curate.

Selborne Church is seen to the most advantage from a steep pasture to the east of the building, called "The Lythe." (The parish,

[The Year 1793.] Page 11

Death of James Carpenter	aged 92 of this Parish	
Registered January 1 st by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Isabel ne infant son	aged of this Parish of Selb	
of Birchill Vale	was buried March 25	1793
Registered March 25 by me	Gil White Curate	
Death of Richard Butler	aged 61 of this Parish	
Registered April 25 by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Death of Richard Butler	aged 61 of this Parish	
Registered April 30 by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Death of Richard Butler	aged 61 of this Parish	
Registered May 3 rd by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Death of William Carpenter	aged 80 of this Parish	
Registered May 25 by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Death of George James Hall	aged 80 of this Parish	
Registered May 26 by me	Gil White Curate	1793
Death of Mary Bury	aged 16 of this Parish	
Registered June 10 by me	Gil White Curate	1793
The Reverend Gilbert White M.D. died	aged 70 of this Parish	
Registered July 6 th by me	Ch ^o Taylor Vicar	1793

SELBORNE PARISH REGISTER

LITERARY BY-PATHS

as has been said, has a vocabulary of its own, due, in White's opinion, to the persistence of the Saxon dialect in the district.) The church is beautifully kept, and the visitor may still confide in its famous curate's description of it. The squat pillars, the "deep and capacious front," the Knights Templars' tombs, are all as they were. But high up in the corner of the chancel wall is a tablet which Gilbert White never saw. This tablet has misled many pilgrims, for its first sentence reads thus: "In the fifth grave from this wall are buried the remains of the Revd Gilbert White, M.A." Naturally, then, search is made for the grave *inside* the church. It is so easy to overlook the inscription at the top of the tablet which records that it was "removed into the chancel MDCCCX." Hardly would the patient historian of the birds and flowers and insects of Selborne have slept peacefully save in that open air which is their home. In the graveyard, then, close to the northeast corner of the church, must the simple headstone be sought which marks where lies the dust of Gilbert White. That lichen-stained stone is a grievance to some people; they write to the vicar, and urge him to place a "modern memorial" over the grave. How many there are who

SELBORNE CHURCH



IN OLD ENGLAND

have no sense of the fitness of things ! Happily the vicar holds the sane opinion that a “modern memorial” would be wholly out of keeping with Gilbert White’s character and work ; that this



IN SELBORNE CHURCH

time-worn stone is the most seemly cenotaph for a man who lived so near to nature as he.

There is no official visitors’ book at Selborne, the only substitute being a somewhat tattered volume kept in the Queen’s Arms Hotel. As the church doors are left constantly open, and as all pilgrims include that building in their tour of inspection, would it not be a good idea to place

LITERARY BY-PATHS

such a book on a desk in the porch? Many famous names are inscribed in the volume kept at the hotel — those of Professor Huxley, Lord Napier and Ettrick, and John Burroughs being



KNIGHTS TEMPLARS' TOMBS

of the number. Some visitors have delivered themselves of opinions as to what should be done to White's resting-place, Mr. Frederic Harrison expressing the hope that on his next visit to Selborne he may find "some attention has been given to the grave and headstone of Gilbert White." Is Mr. Harrison also among the Philistines who pine for a "modern memorial"?

IN OLD ENGLAND

If ever the spirit of Philistinism should so assert itself as to ensure the triumphant erection of a tasteless modern memorial to the famous naturalist, the hope may be expressed that this simple "headstone grey" may still remain to mark the grave of White. He, we may be sure, would have wished for no more ornate memorial.



GILBERT WHITE'S GRAVE

VI

GOLDSMITH'S "DESERTED VILLAGE"

VI

GOLDSMITH'S "DESERTED VILLAGE"

*"Who, of the millions whom he has amused, does not love him?
To be the most loved of English writers, what a title that for a
man!"*

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

THERE is one village we all know and love. The eye of sense may never have rested on its grassy lanes, the ear of sense may never have heard the subdued murmur of its quiet sounds, but its beauties and its harmonies dwell apart in the imagination of us all. Familiar, too, as any friends of flesh and blood are the actors who play their part on this rural stage.

Chief among them, and kindly father of all, stands the village preacher, whose heart's gates were flung as wide open as the doors of his modest home. We know him in his home, in the village street, by the bedside of departing life, and in the church, where

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway."

By the glowing light of his fireside we discern now the form of an aged beggar, anon the wreck

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of a gay spendthrift and again the besoiled uniform of a broken soldier. As these waifs of humanity come and go, as they one by one fill that hospitable chair and are warmed and fed, the one figure which is permanent in the picture is that of the godly host, and his face is ever radiant with tender sympathy. In this lowly cottage, where parting life is laid, it is the same venerable figure, the same kindly face, that bends in loving sorrow over the humble bed. Along the village street, too, we recognise that well-known form, and as the children pluck the flowing gown the same serene countenance bathes them in its smiles. Even when we enter the village church on the holy day of rest, we find the same benign figure claiming of natural right the high position of leader among the simple worshippers within its walls. And as these pictures brighten and fade in the chamber of memory we repeat softly to ourselves :

“Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side ;
But in his duty prompt at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all ;
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.”

IN OLD ENGLAND

Another familiar figure in this dream-world of ours is the village schoolmaster. As he takes his place in the morning at his rude desk we see the anxious faces of his pupils upturned in an eager scrutiny; well skilled are they by rueful experience in determining from his first looks whether the day is to be one of calm or storm. If he cracks a joke, the laughter is out of all proportion to the wit; if he argues in words of "learned length and thundering sound" the amazed rustics marvel that so small a head should hold such a portentous store of knowledge. From the village school the memory passes to the village ale-house, with its

"White-washed wall, and nicely sanded floor,

The varnished clock that clicked behind the door."

Here are the sage statesmen of the rural world, who solve with narrow-visioned ignorance problems such as burden their more responsible prototypes with anxious days and sleepless nights.

But where is this village to be found, and what is its name?

To attempt to answer that twofold question is to tackle a knotty point of literary criticism.

When Thackeray roamed through the Green Isle in search of material for his "Irish Sketch-Book," his route led him along a "more dismal

LITERARY BY-PATHS

and uninteresting road ” than he had ever before seen. That road brought him “through the ‘old, inconvenient, ill-built and ugly town of Athlone.’ The painter would find here, however, some good subjects for his sketch-book in spite of the com-



ATHLONE

mination of the Guide-Book. Here, too,” Thackeray continues, “great improvements are taking place for the Shannon navigation, which will render the town not so inconvenient as at present it is stated to be ; and hard by lies a little village that is known and loved by all the world where English is spoken. It is called Lishoy, but its

IN OLD ENGLAND

real name is Auburn, and it gave birth to one Noll Goldsmith, whom Mr. Boswell was in the habit of despising very heartily."

Thackeray was right to qualify what he calls the "commination of the Guide-Book." Athlone, the most convenient point for a visit to Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," is, on the whole, of all the many provincial towns I visited in a tour which embraced the greater part of Ireland, decidedly the most pleasing and picturesque,—the most pleasing, even apart from its associations with Goldsmith. Starting from the one bridge of the town, which spans the broad Shannon and links the two parts of Athlone together, the main street of the place straggles gently upward, and soon merges into the charming country road which stretches out to Auburn. Thus far the citizens of the midland town have done little to cultivate the gentle art of laying traps for the literary pilgrim. "There are two hotels in Athlone," said an Irishman to me when I was miles away from the place, "and whichever one you go to, you will wish you had gone to the other." That main street in which those two lucky-bag hotels are situated, and the old castle, are much the same in objective appearance as they were during the two years which the boy Oliver Gold-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

smith spent in Athlone at that "school of repute" kept by the Rev. Mr. Campbell. No one knows the fate of that school; its locality in the town and its history subsequent to the pupilage of its most famous scholar are as shrouded in mystery as the place of his burial in the Temple graveyard. Thwarted, then, of the pleasure of paying homage at that shrine, it only remains for the lover of Goldsmith to diffuse his adoration among those aspects of the town upon which the eye of his hero must have fallen. There are, of course, many houses in the principal street which have survived the ravages of a century and a half, including one three-storied building, once occupied by some of Goldsmith's family; but probably the hand of time has rested with the most ineffective touch upon the sturdy walls of Athlone Castle. Some seven centuries have come and gone since those walls first saw their own outlines reflected in the placid waters of the Shannon, and between then and now the castle has played no inconspicuous part in Irish history.

But Athlone — "the ford of the moon," from *Ath Luain*, a name given because there was a ford here used in pagan times by worshippers of the moon — is of primary interest just now as the starting-point for a visit to that village hard

IN OLD ENGLAND

by in which Thackeray makes Goldsmith to be born. Of course he was wrong in naming Lishoy as Goldsmith's natal place, for that honour belongs to Pallas in county Longford; but as Lishoy was the home of his boyhood it possesses quite equal interest for the literary pilgrim.



THE DESERTED VILLAGE

While Oliver Goldsmith was creating his picture of "The Deserted Village," had he any model before him? Lord Macaulay answers emphatically in the negative, and affirms that there never was any such hamlet as Auburn in Ireland. On the other hand Professor Masson replies "yes"

and “no” almost in the same breath. “All Goldsmith’s phantasies,” he says first, “are phantasies of what may be called *reminiscence*. Less than even Smollett, did Goldsmith *invent*. . . . He drew on recollections of his own life, on the history of his own family, on the characters of his relatives, on whimsical incidents that had happened to him in his Irish youth.” But Professor Masson soon forgets his own statements, and then adds that “we are in England and not in Ireland” when we read “The Deserted Village.” This is rather bewildering, but happily Mr. William Black dispels the criticisms of Lord Macaulay and Professor Masson by the penetrating remark that they overlook one of the radical facts of human nature, that is, the magnifying delight of the mind in what is long remembered and remote. “What was it,” Mr. Black asks, “that the imagination of Goldsmith, in his life-long banishment, could not see when he looked back to the home of his childhood, and his early friends, and the sports and occupations of his youth? Lishoy was no doubt a poor enough Irish village; and perhaps the farms were not too well cultivated; and perhaps the village preacher, who was so dear to all the country round, had to administer many a thrashing to a certain graceless son of his; and

IN OLD ENGLAND

perhaps Paddy Byrne was something of a pedant ; and no doubt pigs ran over the ‘ nicely sanded floor ’ of the inn ; and no doubt the village statesmen occasionally indulged in a free fight. But do you think that was the Lishoy that Goldsmith thought of in his dreary lodgings in Fleet Street courts ? No. It was the Lishoy where the vagrant lad had first seen the ‘ primrose peep beneath the thorn ; ’ where he had listened to the mysterious call of the bittern by the unfrequented river ; it was a Lishoy still ringing with the glad laughter of young people in the twilight hours ; it was a Lishoy forever beautiful, and tender, and far away. The grown-up Goldsmith had not to go to any Kentish village for a model ; the familiar scenes of his youth, regarded with all the wistfulness and longing of an exile, became glorified enough.”

If the cogent reasoning set forth above does not convince the pilgrim of the authenticity of Lishoy as a shrine worthy of his devotions, let him turn to “ The Deserted Village ” for final confirmation. Let him ponder, for example, those pathetic lines which read as though written in tears and heart’s blood —

“ In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs — and God has given my share —

LITERARY BY-PATHS

I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down ;
To husband out life's taper at the close,
And keep the flame from wasting by repose :
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw ;
And, as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return — and die at home at last."

Lishoy, or "Auburn," as it is much oftener called, is about seven miles from Athlone. The drive thither, on a mellow end-of-the-summer day, lingers in my memory as a quietly moving panorama of subdued pastoral pictures. Athlone is no sooner lost behind bosky trees and gently swelling hills than, to the left, away down there at the edge of emerald fields, Killinure Lough holds up its mirror to catch the mingling glories of a cerulean sky shot with fleecy clouds. Slowly this picture fades away and gives place to another of the village of Glassen, than which I was to see no more picturesque hamlet in all my travels through Ireland. Approached at either end through an avenue of spreading trees, the one street of the village is lined with neat little cottages, now roofed with thatch, and anon

IN OLD ENGLAND

with warm red tiles. Although abutting sharp upon the road, each house has its climbing rose or trailing vine, and it was the exception rather than the rule to note a window-sill without its box of flowers. A mile or so further, and the



GLASSEN VILLAGE

road dips down between rows of pines and beeches, the pronounced lines of the one accentuating the flowing outlines of the other. And so the jaunting-car bowls merrily on, pausing at last before the ruins of the Goldsmith house. Now the pilgrim seems to tread familiar ground. The journey has taken him through scenes which

LITERARY BY-PATHS

recall no associations, but at the sight of these falling walls, unseen before, the lips murmur almost unconsciously :

“ Near yonder copse, where once the garden smiled,
And still where many a garden flower grows wild,
There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
The village preacher’s modest mansion rose.”

And no sooner does the mind assent to the accuracy of Goldsmith’s description of the outward setting of the house than memory offers her aid to the imagination in an effort to call up again some of the scenes which passed within its walls :

“ His house was known to all the vagrant train —
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain ;
The long-remembered beggar was his guest,
Whose beard, descending, swept his aged breast ;
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed ;
The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
Sat by his fire, and talked the night away,
Wept o’er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were won.
Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe ;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.”

This house must have been a spacious one for a Protestant village parson in Ireland. It stands



GOLDSMITH HOUSE, LISHOY

IN OLD ENGLAND

back some two hundred yards from the road, and is approached by a broad avenue of springy grass, bordered with fine old trees. Five windows and two stories give hints of ample accommodation, and the walls are so stoutly made that the build-



THE "GLASSY BROOK"

ing, considering its history, might well be restored to a habitable condition again.

Leaving the Goldsmith house on the left, a walk of a few hundred paces along the road that turns sharply round past its end brings the pilgrim to an admirable standpoint from which to gain an adequate impression of "Sweet Auburn"

LITERARY BY-PATHS

as a whole. Irregularly hedged pastures rise and fall in gentle undulations, and the road has that welcome grass-fringe so common in England and Ireland but so rare in Scotland. Here and there



THE "BUSY MILL"

the outline of the hedges is broken by tapering or spreading trees, and through those trees peep glimpses of the "sheltered cot, the cultivated farm." No wonder that the memory of this peaceful spot soothed the unstrung spirit of the London-pent Goldsmith ; no wonder he brooded with such delicious painful sorrow over those visions of the happy past which thronged his

IN OLD ENGLAND

brain; no wonder he poured out his heart in that pathetic apostrophe:

“O blest retirement, friend to life’s decline,
Retreat from care that never must be mine,
How blest is he who crowns, in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease;
Who quits the world, where strong temptations try,
And, since ’t is hard to combat, learns to fly!”



THE “DECENT CHURCH”

Of the many sights of Auburn that were familiar to Goldsmith’s eyes, only a few remain. The “busy mill” is still there, but idle now for many a year, and roofless and overgrown with tangled weeds. Close by, too, is the “glassy brook,” more true to its name than would be

LITERARY BY-PATHS

imagined from the poem, so perfect is its reflection of hedge and sky. A mile or so away a "decent church" tops the hill, occupying the same site and doubtless perpetuating the outward



THE CENTRE OF IRELAND

image of the building in which the boy Oliver often listened to the sermons of the Vicar of Wakefield. Not far distant, on the summit of a modest hill that rises from the roadside, stands a rudely built circular stone pillar, which is said to mark the exact centre of Ireland. The wayfarer in these parts cannot resist the thought that in the near future, when Ire-

land gets its share of those who travel in search alike of the beautiful and the shrines of the great, this Goldsmith country will become indeed the centre of the Green Isle.

Such, then, are some of the objective forms which conduct the visitor to Lishoy into the

IN OLD ENGLAND

realm of imagination, and their task is made all the easier by those innumerable other subjective shapes which people these lanes and fields with the children of a far-off generation. And yet they are not far-off from us ; their joys and sorrows are akin to our own ; their living human nature makes them of that family which has no yesterday nor morrow.



GOLDSMITH'S GRAVE IN THE TEMPLE, LONDON

VII

BURNS IN AYRSHIRE

VII

BURNS IN AYRSHIRE

*“The lark of Scotia’s morning sky !
Whose voice may sing his praises ?
With Heaven’s own sunlight in his eye,
He walked among the daisies,
Till through the cloud of fortune’s wrong
He soared to fields of glory ;
But left his land her sweetest song
And earth her saddest story.”*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

BURNS lived for thirty-seven years, and he spent twenty-seven of them in Ayrshire. A line drawn on the map of that county from Irvine in the north to Kirkoswald in the south, deflected through Kilmarnock, Mauchline, and Dalrymple, embraces his homes and haunts prior to the triumphal appearance in Edinburgh. But Irvine, Kilmarnock, and Kirkoswald only retained the poet for a brief season ; the first was the scene of his disastrous attempt to learn flax-dressing, the second only claimed him while he was seeing his poems through the press, and the third witnessed his brief apprenticeship to

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the art of mensuration. Hence a more restricted line will include all of Ayrshire associated with the greater portion of Burns's life. It must start from Alloway, run out to Mount Oliphant, turn back and pass through Tarbolton, touch at Moss-giel, and end in Mauchline. A small theatre for great deeds.

Scotland's two greatest peasant writers — Burns and Carlyle — were both born in houses of their fathers' own building. In the case of Carlyle's father, inasmuch as he was a mason, this is not particularly remarkable ; but the fact that Burns's father reared with his own hands the now famous cottage at Alloway is significant of much in the character of the man. From the days of his early manhood, when poverty drove him from home on his long search after the bare necessities of life, to the closing scene at Lochlea, William Burns was engaged in a never-ceasing struggle to wrest from the earth a fitting sustenance for himself and family, and the only remaining monument of any conquest he made is to be seen in "auld clay biggin" where his immortal son was born.

Alloway was once a separate parish, but towards the end of the seventeenth century it was united with that of Ayr, from the town

IN OLD ENGLAND

of which it is some two miles distant. The approach from Ayr to Alloway is characteristically twentieth century. Small semi-detached villas line the road on either side, and these fade away only to give place to the larger and more pretentious mansions of county magnates, with a race-course for a background. The Burns cottage itself has rather too much the air of a commercial show-place, with its conventional turnstile and persistent charge of twopence for admission. There are relics in plenty scattered around, from the bed in which the poet was born, to the spinning-wheel of his mother; but somehow the air seems stifling to the literary pilgrim, and he is glad to escape from the white glare of mediocre sculpture and the sheen of coffee urns—all duly displayed in the temperance refreshment-room attached to the cottage—to the freer atmosphere outside.

A few hundred yards down the road, in the direction of the “banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon,” the gaunt gables of “Alloway’s auld haunted kirk” rear themselves high in the air. At once the apposite remark of Nathaniel Hawthorne flashes across the mind: “Kirk Alloway is inconceivably small, considering how large a space it fills in our imagination before we see

LITERARY BY-PATHS

it." Its place in literature, as the scene of the midnight orgies witnessed by Tam O' Shanter, was secured by a mere accident. In the fall of the year 1790, one Captain Grose happened to be travelling through Scotland intent on anti-



ALLOWAY'S "AULD HAUNTED KIRK"

quarian study. His path crossed that of Burns, who was then trying his last farming experiment at Ellisland, and the two soon became "unco pack and thick thegither." The poet one day pressed the claims of Alloway Kirk on the anti-quarian's notice and Captain Grose agreed to make a drawing of the building on condition that

IN OLD ENGLAND

the poet furnished an appropriate witch-story as comment. A bargain was struck, and the result was Tam O' Shanter.

From his childhood to his eighteenth year, Burns had been familiar with the old ruin, and his mind was stored with gruesome evil-spirit tragedies of which it had been the theatre. It was easy to draw upon these memories for his share of the bargain with Captain Grose, and not less easy, apparently, to immortalise the exploits of Tam O' Shanter, for the poem is said to have been written in a day. And now Kirk Alloway is only interesting for Tam O' Shanter's sake. All its associations with the joys and sorrows of past generations, its witnessings of baptism, marriage, and funeral, its memories of contrition and aspiration under the spell of Christian exhortation and promise, have faded away, and the ear of imagination loses the echoes of holy psalm in the skirl of that untoward music which fell upon the astonished ears of Tam O' Shanter.

That "winnock-bunker in the east," where sat the beast-shaped musician of that unholy revel, the opened coffins whence were thrust the pallid hands that held aloft the blazing torches, the "span-lang" bairns who gazed with wide-eyed amazement on the swiftly moving dance, the win-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

dow which framed the absorbed face of Tam O' Shanter—these are the sights the eye seeks in Alloway Kirk. Outside its walls, and among the crowded graves which jostle each other with unseemly obstinacy in this scant God's acre, the eye wanders in quest of William Burns's tomb.



GRAVE OF BURNS'S FATHER

Unquestionably the father of Robert Burns had a double right to a resting-place in the shadow of Kirk Alloway; the right of the man whose son lifted it into the realm of poesy, and the right of the man who, years before, rebuilt the ruined walls of its graveyard. It was natu-

IN OLD ENGLAND

ral, then, that William Burns should wish to be buried in Alloway Churchyard, and when he at last laid down the burden of life at Lochlea in 1784, his widow and children did not hesitate as to where his dust should rest. The small headstone which was at first reared over the grave has given place to the more substantial memorial of the present day, on the back of which the son's affectionate tribute is inscribed :

“O ye whose cheek the tear of pity stains,
Draw near with pious rev'rence and attend!
Here lie the loving husband's dear remains,
The tender father, and the gen'rous friend;
The pitying heart that felt for human woe,
The dauntless heart that fear'd no human pride;
The friend of man — to vice alone a foe;
For 'e'en his failings lean'd to virtue's side.'”

It was a lucky chance for Tam O' Shanter that the river Doon and its “auld brig” were within easy hail of Alloway Kirk. That irrepressible “Weel done, Cutty-sark!” started the whole pack of midnight revellers at his horse's heels:

“Now do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the Keystane o' the brig:
There at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross.”

The Doon has a new bridge now to bear the burden of twentieth-century traffic, but the “auld

LITERARY BY-PATHS

brig" still spans the lovely river, an indubitable link between our own time and the stormy night of Tam O' Shanter's ride. Other memories than those of Tam O' Shanter crowd into the mind while musing by the side of the clear-running Doon. Here are the shows of nature



THE BRIG O' DOON

which were frail and vain to weep a loss that turned their lights to shade. Sacred through all time are these banks and braes to the memory of that disconsolate wanderer who reproached the birds for singing and the flowers for blooming, but had no harsh thought for that "fause lover" who had thrown her out of harmony with nature.

In Burns's seventh year the scene of his life shifted from Alloway to Mount Oliphant, a small seventy-acre farm some two miles distant. This was to be his home for more than ten years. The outward setting of Mount Oliphant is probably little different from what it was in the poet's day, though the farm buildings have necessarily been considerably remodelled and enlarged. The new era which opened for Burns with his removal thither was of far-reaching importance; he confessed to Dr. Moore that it was during the time he lived on that farm that his story was most eventful. There, indeed, now from the worthy Murdoch, now from the lips of his remarkable father, and anon at the parish school of Dalrymple, he acquired most of the knowledge which teachers can impart, and there, too, he experienced "the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave."

One incident of the Mount Oliphant days revealed the deep tenderness of the poet's heart. It happened that Murdoch, the old teacher of Robert and Gilbert, visited the farm one night to take farewell of his friends ere leaving for another part of the country, and brought with him a copy of "Titus Andronicus" as a parting

LITERARY BY-PATHS

present to his pupils. When the day's work was done, and the family gathered together, Murdoch began to read the play aloud. He had got to the fifth scene of the second act, where Lavinia appears with her hands cut off and her tongue



MOUNT OLIPHANT

cut out, but when he reached the taunting words of Chiron, "Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands," the entire family besought him, with tears, to cease reading. The father remarked that if they would not hear the end of the tragedy it would be useless to leave the book, whereupon Robert at once struck in with the threat that if it were left he would burn it!

IN OLD ENGLAND

It was not without good cause that the poet complained of the hermit-like existence that fell to his lot on this farm. Gilbert says: "Nothing could be more retired than our general manner of living at Mount Oliphant; we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. There were no boys of our own age or near it in the neighbourhood." This was not altogether a disadvantage. Burns was thus driven in upon himself, and to the study of such books as the family possessed or could borrow. But it was a hard life he lived at Mount Oliphant. He had to labour in the fields to an extent far beyond his strength, and to subsist on food of the poorest description. This continued to his fifteenth autumn, and then he awoke to love and poetry, — henceforth the dual consolation of his life.

It was harvest-time. In his work amid the golden grain it was the fortune of Burns to have for partner a "bewitching creature" a year younger than himself; "a bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." The hour had come which was to awaken the singing soul of Burns, and unseal that fount of lyric love in which all after-time was to rejoice. The story is best given in his own words: "In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself,

LITERARY BY-PATHS

initiated me in that delicious passion which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below. How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the same touch, etc.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labour; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ‘rat-tan,’ when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sang sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like the printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin, but my girl sang a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird’s son, on one of his father’s maids, with whom he was in love, and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for excepting that he could smear sheep and cut peats,

IN OLD ENGLAND

his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself. *Thus with me began love and poetry.*"

Still, Mount Oliphant cannot have been a happy home for the Burns family. The poor



LOCHLEA FARM

and hungry soil of the farm entailed constant labour on every member of the family able to do a hand's turn, and with all their efforts, no adequate recompense was forthcoming. Hence it must have been with a sigh of relief that they turned their back upon the scene of such hardships to make a new trial of life on the farm at Lochlea. This new home of Burns—

LITERARY BY-PATHS

where the next seven years of his life were spent — was situated in the upper part of the parish of Tarbolton. It lies in a hollow, and took its name from a small loch, now no longer in existence. Take it for all in all, Lochlea was perhaps the happiest home the poet ever had. Life never moved more smoothly for him than during the first few years in Tarbolton parish, and as yet his ungovernable passions had not brought him into contact with kirk-sessions and the severer reprimands of his own conscience.

Gilbert Burns used to speak of this period as the brightest in his brother's life, and was wont to recall with delight the happy days they spent together in farm work, when Robert was sure to enliven the tedium of labour with his unrivalled conversation. It was at Lochlea that the incident occurred which prompted "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie," and in a low-lying field near the house the spot where that famous ewe nearly committed suicide is still pointed out. Other first fruits of poesy were gathered during these peaceful days, and many of the seeds planted which were to yield such a prolific harvest at Mossgiel.

Tarbolton village, some two miles distant from

IN OLD ENGLAND

Lochlea, naturally figures largely in this period of Burns's life. Its chief street still retains some continuity with the past. Sandwiched in here and there between houses of recent date may be seen many of the rough-cast,thatch-covered cottages common in the poet's time. Among modern buildings, the most conspicuous are a public



TARBOLTON

library and a masonic hall. The latter, which contains some valuable Burns relics, has not been erected many years, but is already permeated with dry rot and is in a filthy condition. The library contains about two thousand volumes, and the only Burns literature visible is an odd

LITERARY BY-PATHS

volume of a three-volumed edition of the poems ! It is not surprising, then, to hear the Tarbolton people frankly confess that they “take no interest in Burns.”

There are various links connecting Burns with Tarbolton, one being recalled by that sentence in his autobiography which runs : “At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and set want at defiance ; and as I never cared further for any labours than while I was in actual exercise, *I spent the evening in the way after my own heart.*” The beginning of this appears to have been attendance at a dancing-school in Tarbolton. Such institutions are still the common introductions to courtship in rural Scotland, and in the case of Burns there can be no doubt that his dancing-school experiences led to those innumerable love episodes which now began to bulk so largely in his history.

Gilbert Burns, writing of this period, says his brother “was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver,” and David Sillar, a boon companion of the poet, remarks that he was frequently struck with Burns’s facility in addressing the fair sex. The Lochlea loves have left their impress on his poems. The mansion house of Coilsfield — transformed by the poet to, and known as,

IN OLD ENGLAND

Montgomery Castle — is in the vicinity of Tarbolton, and two of its servants were fated to find immortality through the young farmer of Lochlea. The first was the heroine of “Montgomerie’s Peggy.” She was housekeeper at Coilsfield, and Burns says of her that she was his deity for six or eight months. He adds: “She had been bred in a style of life rather elegant, but (as Vanbrugh says in one of his plays) my ‘damned star found me out’ there too; for although I began the affair merely in a *gaieté de cœur*, it will scarcely be believed that a vanity of showing my parts in courtship, particularly my abilities at a *billet-doux* (which I always piqued myself upon), made me lay siege to her. When — as I always do in my foolish gallantries — I had battered myself into a very warm affection for her, she one day told me, in a flag of truce, that her fortress had been for some time before the rightful property of another. I found out afterwards, that what she told me of a pre-engagement was really true; but it cost me some heartaches to get rid of the affair.”

There is a tradition that “Highland Mary” — that is, Mary Campbell — was at one time dairy-maid at Coilsfield, and it is not improbable that Burns first made her acquaintance there. At

LITERARY BY-PATHS

any rate, the lovely rivulet Fail, which runs through the grounds of Montgomery Castle, mingles with the nature-background of his most famous song to Mary's memory :

“Ye banks, and braes, and streams around
The castle o' Montgomery !
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie :
There Summer first unfold her robes,
And there the langest tarry!
For there I took the last Farewell
O' my sweet Highland Mary !”



ON THE FAIL

But there was another side to Burns's evenings from home. Sociable by nature, he availed himself of every opportunity of convivial intercourse with young men of his own age and station. Hence the creation of that Bachelor's Club, where the topics

IN OLD ENGLAND

for discussion seem to have been selected on the principle of consoling its members for their temporary absence from the fair sex. Hence, too, Burns's action in becoming a Freemason. His initiation took place on July 4, 1781, and the old thatched cottage in which the ceremony took place still stands at the corner of Mauchline Road. It was at a meeting of the lodge that the idea of "Death and Dr. Horn-



MASONIC LODGE, TARBOLTON

book" took shape. John Wilson, the Tarbolton schoolmaster, who eked out his scholastic earnings by amateur physicking, one evening paraded his medical knowledge in such an ostentatious manner that Burns resolved, on his way home, to hold the dominie-medico up to ridicule. With what result the world knows. The scene of the dialogue between Burns and Death is laid just outside Tarbolton. Leaving the old Masonic Lodge on the right, the road winds "round about" a high mound, and then descends toward Willie's Mill. In the bank by the road-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

side, under the shadow of a hedge, local tradition points to a few rough, projecting stones as the seat where the poet and his gaunt friend "eased their shanks" while discussing the skill of Dr. Hornbook.



WILLIE'S MILL

When William Burns died in 1784, the last link was snapped which held his family at Lochlea. Prior to that event, however, Robert and Gilbert had taken the farm of Mossgiel, "as an asylum for the family in case of the worst." With the removal to Mossgiel, the poet took a resolve to mend his ways and address himself seriously to the work of life. "I read farming

books," he said, " I calculated crops, I attended markets, and, in short, in spite of the devil, and the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man ; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second, from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

It is impossible to doubt that Burns really desired to settle down for himself. Already he had made several efforts in that direction, each of which had been remorselessly thwarted. He groped about for the clue which should enable him to unravel his life in an orderly fashion ; but it was his misfortune always to lay hold of a loop in the skein, and by violent tugging at that to reduce the whole to a hopeless tangle. " The great misfortune of my life," he confesses, " was to want an aim." At first, Mossgiel promised to provide that aim. His father was dead ; on him and his brother Gilbert had devolved the care of the widowed mother and her other fatherless children. But the trinity of evil proved too strong for the poet. The world, in the shape of convivial companions ; the devil, in the form of bad seed and late harvests ; the flesh, in the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

enchantments of love, — these met Burns's resolution in a stern stand-up fight, and speedily won a complete victory. Hence it came to pass that the Mossgiel period was of crucial importance in the life of Burns; it made his weakness as a man and his powers as a poet patent to the world.

Mossgiel farm is situated in the parish of Mauchline, from the town of which name it is about a mile distant. Whatever it may have been in the poet's time, it strikes the visitor in these days as a most desirable home. Although written more than seventy years ago, Wordsworth's sonnet is still accurate in its chief outlines :

“ ‘ There ! ’ said a Stripling, pointing with meet pride
Towards a low roof with green trees half concealed,
‘ Is Mossgiel Farm ; and that ’ s the very field
Where Burns ploughed up the Daisy. ’ Far and wide
A plain below stretched seaward, while, descried
Above sea-clouds, the Peaks of Arran rose :
And, by that simple notice, the repose
Of earth, sky, sea, and air, was vivified.
Beneath ‘ the random *biold* of clod or stone ’
Myriads of daisies have shone forth in flower
Near the lark’s nest, and in their natural hour
Have passed away ; less happy than the One
That, by the unwilling ploughshare, died to prove
The tender charm of poetry and love. ”



MOSSGIEL FARM

IN OLD ENGLAND

The house stands on a high ridge, some sixty yards back from the road, and is screened with the stalwart thorn hedge which the poet and his brother are said to have planted. Its walls have been considerably raised since it was Burns's home, and the roof of thatch has given place to



THE FIELD OF THE DAISY

one of slates. When Hawthorne visited it in 1857, and forced his way inside in the absence of the family, he found it remarkable for nothing so much as its dirt and dunghill odour. There is neither dirt nor odour to-day. The goodwife of the present occupant of Mossgiel, Mr. Wyllie, keeps her house spotlessly clean, notwithstanding

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the demands made upon her time by innumerable inquisitive visitors. On the parlour table lies a copious visitors' book, and in the same room hang the manuscript of "The Lass o' Ballochmyle," and the letter in which Burns asked Miss Alexander's permission to publish the song. At the back of the house lies the field where Burns turned down the daisy, and the soil "seems to have been consecrated to daisies by the song which he bestowed on that first immortal one." Over the hedge, there is the other field where the poet's ploughshare tore up the mouse's nest.

The neighbouring town of Mauchline is a central spot in the history of Burns. In its dancing-hall he first met Jean Armour, the inspirer of many of his deathless songs, and the destined wifely companion of his fortunes; under the roof of Poosie Nansie's hostel he saw the tattered vagrants whom his imagination transferred to the pages of literature in "The Jolly Beggars;" outside the old church he often witnessed those unseemly incidents so unsparingly satirised in "The Holy Fair;" Mauchline Castle was the home of his warm-hearted friend, Gavin Hamilton, and the scene of several interesting events in his own life; and in the churchyard sleep

IN OLD ENGLAND



THE COWGATE, MAUCHLINE

many whom he marked as targets for invective or subjects for eulogy. Perhaps because it is not quite such a rural outpost, Mauchline has

LITERARY BY-PATHS

changed more than Tarbolton. Still, there are many buildings which take the mind back to the poet's time, and in the main the topography of the place is practically unchanged. The Cowgate illustrates both facts. Here there are several houses which have changed but little during



POOSIE NANSIE'S, MAUCHLINE

the past hundred years, and the position of the street, with the church at the end, provides an illuminating comment on that verse of "The Holy Fair" which records how

" . . . Peebles, frae the water-fit
Ascends the holy rostrum :
See, up he 's got the word o' God,

IN OLD ENGLAND

An' meek an' mim has view'd it,
While Common-sense has ta'en the road,
An' aff, an' up the Cowgate
Fast, fast that day."

At the corner of the Cowgate stands Poesie Nansie's hostel, bearing upon its gable-end the



NANSE TINNOCK'S

legend that it is "The Jolly Beggars' Howf." In the time of Burns this cottage was a lodging-house for vagrants, and it seems that the poet and some of his companions were wont to drop in occasionally late at night to see the maimed and blind in their undress of sound limbs and opened eyes.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“Ae night at e’en a merry core
O’ randie, gangrel bodies,
In Poosie Nansie’s held the splore,
To drink their orra duddies.
Wi’ quaffing an’ laughing
They ranted an’ they sang;
Wi’ jumping an’ thumping,
The vera girdle rang.”

Another resort of Burns in these Mauchline days has honourable mention in one of his early poems. Towards the close of “The Author’s Earnest Cry and Prayer,” he exclaims :

“Tell yon guid bluid o’ auld Bonconnock’s,
I’ll be his debt twa mashlum bonnocks,
An’ drink his health in auld Nanse Tinnock’s
Nine times a week,
If he some scheme, like tea and winnocks,
Wad kindly seek.”

In a footnote to the name of Nanse Tinnock the poet explained that she was “a worthy old hostess of the author’s in Mauchline, where he sometimes studied politics over a glass of guid, auld Scotch drink.” Nanse Tinnock’s house may still be seen down a narrow lane leading towards the churchyard, and opposite is the cottage where Burns is said to have “taken up house” with Jean Armour.

From the windows of this cottage a good view is obtained of Mauchline Castle, in the business

IN OLD ENGLAND

room of which Burns is reputed to have been married. The castle has undergone little or no change these hundred years, and it is easy to recall that Sabbath morning when the worthy Gavin Hamilton, petitioned by his children for some new potatoes for dinner,



MAUCHLINE CASTLE

instructed his gardener to dig a few, little thinking that the eyes of the “unco guid” were upon him and that the Mauchline kirk-session would bring him to book for such sacrilegious fatherly indulgence.

Facing the head of the main street the visitor observes a building-block divided into several houses, and his interest in it is quickened when he learns that the house at the near corner was the home of the Morrisons. From this house to the churchyard is but a few steps, and one of the first tombstones to arrest his attention reads thus: “In memory of Adj. John Morrison, of the 104th Regiment, who died at Mauchline, 16th April, 1804, in the 80th year of his age;

LITERARY BY-PATHS

also his daughter Mary — the Poet's Bonnie Mary Morrison — who died 29th June, 1791, aged 20." Other tombstones bear names or are linked with memories of men and women just as familiar. In a far-off corner, with a whitewashed wall for background, stands the memorial of the Rev. William Auld, better known to fame as the "Daddie Auld" of "The Kirk's Alarm." By its side lie the ashes of Johnnie Richmond, that Mauchline friend of



MARY MORRISON'S HOME

Burns who was his first host in Edinburgh. A time-worn slab marks the grave of William Fisher, that village Pharisee whose after life and death justified the "Prayer" Burns

put in his mouth. The inscription has faded away, but every reader of Burns can supply the epitaph :

" Here Holy Willie's sair worn clay
Taks up its last abode ;
His saul has ta'en some other way, —
I fear, the left-hand road."

Not far from Holy Willie's grave is the lair of Gavin Hamilton, enclosed with a simple iron railing, but devoid of any memorial stone. Such was the wish of that worthy lawyer, and hence his epitaph must be sought in the pages of Burns.

“The poor man weeps — here Gavin sleeps,
Whom canting wretches blam'd;
But with such as he, where'er he be,
May I be sav'd or damn'd!”

Adjoining the end of the church is the burial-place of the Alexanders of Ballochmyle, the top marble tablet on the left hand commemorating the laird of the poet's time. One other grave of interest is that of the Armours, from whose family Burns chose his wife, and under the prostrate stone within these railings the infant daughters of the poet are buried.

One of the favourite walks of Burns was among the braes of Ballochmyle, some two miles distant, and no poet could have made a better choice in the Mauchline country-side. Close by, the river Ayr runs its turbulent course, and between the two he had copious material for poetic thought. But, somehow, it is humanity rather than nature which asserts its supremacy while wandering among the Ayr-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

shire homes and haunts of Burns. It is fit it should be so, for a large part of the world's debt to Burns consists in the fact that he made common life classical. To coin quotable couplets out of the ordinary incidents of lowliest lives was his prerogative. The world sadly needed teaching to make an ideal out of its actual, and that lesson he taught. The annals



THE BANKS OF AYR

of the poorest peasant's life are now as immortal as the exploits of Hector or the victories of Achilles. Little things have become great things since Burns sang of them.

The mouse is a demigod now ; the daisy a flower of Paradise. The oft-returning Saturday night of the cottar is no longer the common thing it was ; it is a sacrament of life.

Fresh links of sympathy and love between man and beast have been forged by the pen of Burns, and even the food on our tables — the “halesome parritch, chief o’ Scotia’s food,” and haggis, “great chieftain o’ the pudding-race,” —

IN OLD ENGLAND

is as the ambrosia of the immortals. Burns achieved the apotheosis of common life, and the height of that achievement can nowhere be better measured than among his Ayrshire homes.

VIII

KEATS AND HIS CIRCLE

VIII

KEATS AND HIS CIRCLE

"No one else in English poetry, save Shakespeare, has in expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness. 'I think,' he said humbly, 'I shall be among the English poets after my death.' He is ; he is with Shakespcare."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

"O THE flummery of a birthplace !" was the ejaculation in which Keats indulged apropos of the disappointment he felt in visiting the cottage in which Burns was born. No pilgrim to his own natal shrine is likely to repeat the phrase, for of the birthplace of John Keats no stone is left upon another.

Perhaps it is well that it should be so. Than the sombre neighbourhood of Finsbury Pavement, London, it would be difficult to imagine a birthplace more incongruous with the life-story of a poet so wedded to romantic beauty as Keats. Not that there is much in common with the district as it is to-day and as it was when the poet was born on the 31st October, 1795 ; but however pleasant the neighbourhood might have been

LITERARY BY-PATHS

a century or more ago, it would be its aspect to-day which would oppress the pilgrim. There need be no regrets, then, that the Swan-and-Hoop livery-stable has been swept away, nor that the house in Craven Street, City Road, to which the Keats family removed a few years after John's birth, has also vanished.

Notwithstanding much assiduous research, little is known concerning Thomas Keats, the father of the poet. He came from the west of England, but whether Devon or Cornwall was his native county is uncertain. One of his son's friends describes him as a "native of Devon," but his daughter remembered hearing him say that he came from Land's End. The presence of Thomas Keats at the Finsbury livery-stable is accounted for by his holding the position of head ostler, and that he was no ordinary head ostler is proved by the fact that the proprietor, Mr. John Jennings, made no opposition to his marriage with his daughter, Frances. His famous son appears to have reproduced his personal appearance, making it certain that we may imagine Thomas Keats as of small stature but of vivacious expression; while regarding his mental equipment Charles Cowden Clarke, who was schoolmate with the poet, testifies that Thomas

IN OLD ENGLAND

Keats was “of so remarkably fine a common sense and native respectability that I perfectly remember the warm terms in which his demeanour used to be canvassed by my parents after he had been to visit his boys.”

It was not the least of the many misfortunes of Keats that he was deprived so early in life of so estimable a father. No doubt the seeds of consumption, to which he fell an untimely victim, were fatally rooted in his constitution from an early year, but it is impossible to resist the conclusion that monetary anxieties contributed not a little to his early death. Nor is it possible to overlook the adverse influence upon one of such delicate health of the acrimonious disputes which the obstinacy of the family guardian, Mr. Abbey, made of frequent occurrence. From both these disturbing factors Keats would have been free had his father lived. But it was not to be. Ere the poet had reached his ninth year his father was dead. How he met his death is related in the following paragraph, which appeared in the “Times” of Tuesday, April 17, 1804:

“On Sunday Mr. Keats, livery-stable keeper in Moorfields, went to dine at Southgate; he returned at a late hour, and on passing down

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the City-road, his horse fell with him, when he had the misfortune to fracture his skull. It was about one o'clock in the morning when the watchman found him, he was at that time alive, but speechless; the watchman got assistance, and took him to a house in the neighbourhood, where he died about 8 o'clock."

When this bereavement overtook Keats, he was at Enfield, a pupil in the school of the Rev. John Clarke. It is many years now since that building was pulled down to make room for a railway station, but happily a portion of the structure still survives, and is now illustrated for the first time in connection with the poet's career. Of the history of this house, Cowden Clarke, the son of the master of the school, narrates that it "had been built by a West India merchant in the latter end of the seventeenth or beginning of the eighteenth century. It was of the better character of the domestic architecture of that period, the whole front being of the purest red brick, wrought by means of moulds into rich designs of flowers and pomegranates, with heads of cherubim over niches in the centre of the building." Because it was such an excellent example of the early Georgian



FAÇADE OF KEATS'S SCHOOLHOUSE

domestic architecture, and not because it formed part of the building in which Keats was educated, the façade of this Enfield schoolhouse escaped the usual fate of demolished bricks and mortar, and may now be seen in an annex

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of the South Kensington Museum, London, amid a motley collection of ship models and bottled monstrosities. Perhaps the warning may be offered that it will be idle for the pilgrim to question the museum authorities as to the whereabouts of the schoolhouse of John Keats; they are, or were, ignorant that such a treasure is in their charge; but if inquiry be made, as per the catalogue, for the "specimen of old English ornamental brick work and carving from an old house at Enfield, Middlesex," the seeker will in due time be rewarded by gazing upon at least a portion of the building which is our earliest surviving link with the life of Keats. It will be seen how accurate and justifiable is Cowden Clarke's eulogistic description of this fragment of his old home, and now that its association with the school-days of the poet is placed on record it may be hoped that something will be done to make that fact emphatic for the information of all future visitors to the museum.

Although Cowden Clarke was the elder of Keats by some seven years, a close friendship between the two appears to have been a matter of early and rapid growth. And this friendship had momentous consequences in two directions. It seems probable that Keats was first encour-

IN OLD ENGLAND

aged to make trial of his poetic powers by the son of his schoolmaster, and in any case that son was responsible for introducing the young poet to Leigh Hunt, and thus indirectly opened the doorway through which Keats made his entrance into the literary coteries of those days. Keats, in fact, was singularly fortunate in his friends. "The days of the years of his life," writes Mr. Sidney Colvin in the closing words of his sympathetic study, "were few and evil, but above his grave the double aureole of poetry and friendship shines immortally." Much of that good fortune he owed to his own character. All who knew Keats personally unite in offering glowing testimony to his lovable nature. One testified, "A sweeter tempered man I never knew;" another, in the retrospect of twenty years, spoke of him as one "whose genius I did not, and do not, more fully admire than I entirely loved the man;" while a third, writing when the poet's final illness was hastening to its close, said, "He must get well again, if but for me — I cannot afford to lose him." Such a man deserved the best of friends, and in the case of Keats deserts were, for once, rewarded as they should be.

Perhaps, however, the fortune of the poet in

LITERARY BY-PATHS

this matter was not wholly without blemish. It is allowable, for example, to doubt whether the friendship of Leigh Hunt was entirely beneficial for Keats. On its social side it was, no doubt, a valuable asset, but the literary influence of Hunt must be charged with retarding the ripening of the younger poet's powers, and that Keats was generally regarded as a "follower" of the "Examiner's" editor undoubtedly prejudiced his chances of receiving fair play in the literary criticism of the time. Had Keats never made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt, it is more than probable that he would never have been chosen to stand in the pillory for the amusement of the readers of "Blackwood" and the "Quarterly."

Of more limited value still was the friendship of the painter Haydon. Keats was usually so sane in his judgments of men, had such an unerring eye for their defects and weaknesses, that it is amazing his head should have been turned by Haydon's notice and speedy offer of friendship. He took the painter at his own estimate, and readers of Haydon's "Autobiography" do not need to be informed how colossal that estimate was. No wonder, then, that Keats was beside himself with joy when the mighty painter promised to make "a finished chalk sketch" of his

head to serve as a frontispiece for "Endymion," coupling the promise with the characteristic assertion that he had "never done the thing for any human being," and that, as he intended signing it, the drawing "must have considerable effect." It was also characteristic that the promise was not kept. Still, posterity owes some debt to the friendship of



HAYDON'S LIFE-MASK OF KEATS

Haydon, for it was he who executed the life-mask of Keats which his sister declared to be the best likeness ever made of her brother.

Notwithstanding these limitations, it still holds good that Keats was singularly fortunate in his friends and if he had been asked which of those friends he valued most, his reply would undoubtedly have been in favour of John Hamilton Reynolds. Such a verdict must be concurred in by every student of the poet, and it should be

LITERARY BY-PATHS

placed to the credit of Leigh Hunt that the introduction was effected through him. This friendship naturally gave Keats admission to the family circle of the Reynoldses in their home in Little Britain, and that he valued the privilege is manifest from more than one passage in his letters. It was a privilege he shared in common with Charles Lamb and Thomas Hood, and many



JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

other literary aspirants of the early nineteenth century. That fact alone might be sufficient to stamp the Reynoldses as a remarkable family. But other proofs are available.

Only a bare fact or two is known about the father. He was mathematical and head writing master in Christ's Hospital,

and had, according to the testimony of one of his grandsons, a rooted objection to having his

IN OLD ENGLAND

personal appearance delineated in any way. Hence, although two of his grandsons were skilled artists, and his son-in-law, Thomas Hood,



MR. REYNOLDS, SNR.

made many efforts to persuade him to give some painter a sitting, a rough pen sketch is practically the only likeness that exists. As will be seen from the reproduction, it depicts him as a quaintly garbed, jolly old gentleman, ready for

LITERARY BY-PATHS

such practical jokes as we know he was willing to share in when visiting Hood. Perhaps this view of his character is scarcely confirmed by the presentment of him which figures in a sketch Hood made of the wedding of his sister-in-law



MRS. REYNOLDS, SNR.

Mariane Reynolds, but one hardly looks for likenesses in caricatures of that kind.

Charlotte Reynolds, the mother, had aspirations of a literary kind, though we get no hint of that fact from the letters of Keats. He was dead, however, before Mrs. Reynolds courted fame with

her one and only book, the title of which ran: "Mrs. Leslie and Her Grandchildren: A Tale. By Mrs. Hamerton." There is a copy of this modest little volume in the British Museum, but there is no evidence to show whether it secured much or little favour with the public.

Hood appears to have sent a copy to Charles Lamb, and his opinion of the effort will be found elsewhere. The portrait of Mrs. Reynolds was painted at Hood's house at Wanstead, and is the only counterfeit in existence of a woman who deserves well of the student of literature for the unfailing hospitality she extended to so many of its famous sons.

There were four daughters in the Reynolds family, of whom one, Jane, as hinted above, became the wife of Thomas Hood. The eldest, Mariane, married Mr. Green, and had for her two sons the gifted artists Charles and Towneley Green. It was to celebrate her wedding that Hood drew the water-colour sketch which will be found in another part of this volume. In the foreground of this sketch the third sister, Charlotte, occupies a prominent position, with a hooked arm outstretched in a vain endeavour—such was Hood's jest—to emulate her sister in catching a husband. The antipathy of Mr. Reynolds senior to having his portrait taken in any way seems to have been shared by his eldest daughter Mariane, for she would never give a sitting even to one of her two artist sons. Hence the only likeness surviving of this friend of Keats is the meagre pen and ink sketch reproduced.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

With the father and mother and the four sisters Keats enjoyed much friendly intercourse, though towards the close of his life, for reasons



MRS. GREEN, *née* MARIANE REYNOLDS

which it is not necessary to recapitulate, the sisters lost some of his regard. But in his friendship for their brother, John Hamilton Reynolds, there was no rift from beginning to end. Of all his literary associates, he was the most congenial spirit, and Lord Houghton rightly insists upon the “invaluable worth of his friendship.” On

this point the testimony of Mr. Sidney Colvin may also be cited, for he is at one with all the biographers of Keats in affirming Reynolds to have been one of the poet's wisest friends, and points out that he "by judicious advice more than once saved him from a mistake."

Although nearly a year younger than Keats, Reynolds preceded him in the publication of a volume of verse by three years, and had, indeed, placed no fewer than four books to his credit ere Keats issued his first volume. Reynolds was only eighteen when, in 1814, he published his first work "Safie, an Eastern Tale." As the poem was frankly imitative of Byron, and inscribed to him, it was natural that Reynolds should forward an early copy to that poet. Although he was accustomed to attentions of that kind, Byron took the earliest opportunity of acknowledging the book and its dedication, and his letter is interesting, not only for its opinion of Reynolds but also for its personal note. It is dated Feb. 20, 1814.

"SIR, — My absence from London till within these last few days and business since have hitherto prevented my acknowledgment of the volume I have lately received and the inscrip-

tion it contains, for both of which I beg leave to return you my thanks and best wishes for the success of your book and its author. The poem itself as the work of a young man is highly creditable to your talents, and promises better for future efforts than any which I can now recollect. Whether you intend to pursue your poetical career I do not know and can have no right to enquire, but in whatever channel your abilities are directed, I think it will be your own fault if they do not eventually lead to distinction. Happiness must of course depend upon conduct, but even fame itself would be but poor compensation for self-reproach. You will excuse me for talking to a man perhaps not many years my junior with these grave airs of seniority, but though I cannot claim much advantage in that respect it was my lot to be thrown very early upon the world, to mix a good deal in it in more climates than one, and to purchase experience which would probably have been of greater service to any one than myself. But my business with you is in your capacity of author, and to that I will confine myself.

“The first thing a young writer must expect and yet can least of all suffer is *criticism*. I did

not bear it. A few years and many changes have since passed over my head, and my reflections on that subject are attended with regret. I find on dispassionate comparison my own revenge was more than the provocation warranted. It is true I was young; that might be an excuse to those I attacked, but to *me* it is none. The best reply to all objections is to write better, and if your enemies will not then do you justice the world will. On the other hand, you should not be discouraged; to be opposed is not to be vanquished, though a timid mind is apt to mistake every scratch for a mortal wound. There is a saying of Dr. Johnson's which it is well to remember that 'No man was ever written down except by himself.'

"I sincerely hope that you will meet with as few obstacles as yourself can desire, but if you should you will find that they are to be stepped over; to kick them down is the first resolve of a young and fiery spirit, a pleasant thing enough at the time, but not so afterwards. On this point I speak of a man's *own* reflections afterwards; what others think or say is a secondary consideration, at least it has been with me, but will not answer as a general maxim. He who would make his way in the world must let the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

world believe that it made it for him, and accommodate himself to the minutest of its regulations.

“ I beg leave once more to thank you for your pleasing present, and have the honour to be

“ Your obliged and very obedient servant,

“ BYRON.”

Although Keats and Reynolds were not blind to the weaknesses of Wordsworth, they had — which is more to their credit considering the general critical attitude of their day towards the Lake poet — a keen appreciation of the undying qualities of his best work. In one of his earliest sonnets Keats gave worthy and unstinted homage to the poet

“ Who on Helvellyn’s summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel’s wing ;”

and when Haydon proposed to send a copy of the sonnet to Wordsworth the idea put the young poet “out of breath.” You know, he added, “with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him.” As this homage was shared by Reynolds, it is not surprising that he should have sent a copy of his fourth book, “The Naiad: a Tale,” published in 1816, to Rydal Mount.

IN OLD ENGLAND

Wordsworth's reply, not before published, is as characteristic as the acknowledgment Byron made of the "Safie" volume. In their several



MRS. JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

ways, these two epistles are not unworthy additions to the Letters to Young Authors which are so plentiful in English literary correspondence ; and it is noteworthy that Wordsworth as well as

Byron is at pains to prepare Reynolds for the inevitable depressing effect of criticism. Here is Wordsworth's letter, dated from Rydal Mount, Nov. 28, 1816 :

“ MY DEAR SIR, — A few days ago I received a parcel through the hands of Messrs. Longman containing your poem ‘The Naiad, etc.,’ and a letter, accompanying it, for both which marks of your attention you will accept my cordial thanks. Your poem is composed with elegance and in a style that accords with the subject, but my opinion on this point might have been of more value if I had seen the Scottish ballad on which your work is founded. You do me the honour of asking me to find fault in order that you may profit by my remarks. I remember when I was young in the practice of writing praise was prodigiously acceptable to me and censure most distasteful, nay, even painful. For the credit of our nature I would fain persuade myself to this day that the extreme labour and tardiness with which my compositions were brought forth had no inconsiderable influence for exciting both those sensations. Presuming, however, that you have more philosophy than I was master of at that time, I will not scruple to say that your

poem would have told more upon me, if it had been shorter. How unceremoniously not to say ungraciously do I strike home! But I am justified to my own mind from a persuasion that it was better to put the objection in this abrupt way, than to introduce it by an accompanying compliment which, however well merited, would have stood in the way of the effect which I aim at — your reformation. Your fancy is too luxuriant, and riots too much upon its own creations. Can you endure to be told by one whom you are so kind as to say you respect that in his judgment your poem would be better without the first 57 lines (not condemned for their own sakes), and without the last 146, which nevertheless have in themselves much to recommend them. The basis is too narrow for the superstructure, and to me it would have been more striking barely to have hinted at the deserted Fair One and to have left it to the imagination of the reader to dispose of her as he liked. Her fate dwelt upon at such length requires of the reader a sympathy which cannot be furnished without taking the Nymph from the unfathomable abyss of the cerulean waters and beginning afresh upon terra firma. I may be wrong but I speak as I felt, and the most profitable criticism

is the record of sensations, provided the person affected be under no partial influence.

“I am gratified by your favourable opinion of my labours. As a slight return for your obliging attentions will you accept of a copy of my ‘Thanksgiving Ode’ and ‘Letter upon Bacon,’ which will be put into your hands if you will take the trouble of presenting the underwritten order to Messrs. Longman. When you call there, will you be so kind as to mention that I have received complaints from Edinburgh that these two publications have not arrived there as was expected, agreeable to the directions which I had given.

“Pray beg of Messrs. Longman that as many copies of each as I requested may be sent forthwith.

“I am, dear Sir, with great respect,

“Your obliged servant,

“W. WORDSWORTH.”

Although Wordsworth’s letter can hardly have been regarded by Reynolds as so encouraging as Byron’s, yet, allowing for the difference in the men, he would have been justified in deriving some satisfaction from its contents. At any rate, the fact that he did not post a copy of his

next poem to Rydal Mount must not be hastily interpreted as a proof that he was annoyed with Wordsworth for his plain speaking. There was another, and far more understandable, reason why he did not venture to trouble Wordsworth again. That reason opens up an interesting, but little known, by-path in English literary history, and explains how it came to pass that there are three poems bearing the title of "Peter Bell."

Reynolds, in common with Keats and all the literary members of their "set," opposed to the last Wordsworth's pet theory that the humblest incidents of lowly life described in the most homely way were "within the compass of poetic probability;" even more were they offended with Wordsworth for his perverse persistence in employing vulgar or ridiculous names for the titles of his poems or for the cognomens of the characters in those poems. Wordsworth was perfectly aware of this feeling among his most ardent admirers and advocates, but, with characteristic confidence in his own judgment, he kept calmly on his way, perpetrating title after title and name after name of such a nature as caused his friends fresh grief and gave his foes renewed justification for their scoffing. Early in the year 1819, an announcement was made in the papers to the effect that a

new poem by Mr. Wordsworth, entitled "Peter Bell," would shortly be published. This was the last straw for Reynolds, whose bright wit saw in the bare announcement an opportunity of showing Wordsworth by means of parody how open to ridicule his titles were. As will be seen in the sequel, the idea was as rapidly executed as it was conceived, and consequently the "Peter Bell" of Reynolds was published before the "Peter Bell" of Wordsworth. The situation must have been somewhat perplexing to the book-buyer of 1819, though as the title-page of the spurious "Peter Bell" did not give any author's name, and bore the motto, "I do affirm I am the REAL SIMON PURE," the knowing ones may have guessed the fraud.

Not so, however, Coleridge. Isolated, in his Highgate retreat, from the literary society of the day, he had to rely largely upon his newspaper for news of the world of books, and although the announcement of Wordsworth's forthcoming poem seems to have escaped him, the intimation of Reynolds's "Peter Bell" did not. That intimation caused him many moments of uneasiness, as the ensuing correspondence, hitherto unpublished, will show. Shortly after "Peter Bell" had been issued from the press, on the 16th

of April, 1819, to be explicit, the publishers of Reynolds's parody, Messrs. Taylor and Hessey—who were also the generous publishers and unfailing friends of Keats—were doubtless considerably astonished to receive the following letter from Coleridge, written on that day from Highgate :

“DEAR SIRS,—I hope, nay I feel confident, that you will interpret this note in its real sense, namely, as a proof of the esteem and respect which I entertain towards you both. Looking in the ‘Times’ this morning I was startled by an advertisement of ‘Peter Bell: a Lyrical Ballad,’ with a very significant motto from one of our comedies of Charles II’s reign, tho’ what it signifies I wish to ascertain. ‘Peter Bell’ is a poem of Mr. Wordsworth’s, and I have not heard that it has been published by him. If it have, and with his name (I have reason to believe that he never publishes anonymously), and this now advertised be a ridicule upon it, I have nothing to say. But if it have not, I have ventured to pledge myself for you that you would not wittingly give the high respectability of your names to an attack upon a *Manuscript* work, which no man could assail but by a base breach of trust. Merciful Heavens ! no one could dare read a copy

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of verses at his own fireside, if such a practice were endured by honest men! And that the poem itself should have been published by you, unless with Mr. Wordsworth's consent, is morally impossible.

"I just remember the first lines of Mr. W.'s 'Peter Bell':

'There's something in a flying horse,
There's something in a huge balloon;
But through the air I'll never float
Until I get a little boat,
In shape just like the crescent moon.

And I *have* got a little boat.' etc.

Had it been in my power I should have gone to town, to see what this 'Peter Bell' (the true Simon Pure) is, and to have rectified any mistake I may have made (though I can imagine no other but that the poem may have been published by Mr. Wordsworth and I have not heard of it), without mention of my preceding apprehensions. But as I could not do this, and felt really uneasy, I resolved to throw myself on your good opinion of the sincerity with which I subscribe myself, dear Sirs,

"Yours most respectfully,

"S. T. COLERIDGE."

Coleridge had no cause to complain of his reply. His letter was probably sent by hand, for the answer Messrs. Taylor and Hessey returned bears the same date as Coleridge's epistle of enquiry, and it deserves to be cited in full, not only because it gives the genesis of Reynolds's parody, but also because it faithfully reflects the real distress which Wordsworth's insistence on his theory caused his most sincere admirers. The explanatory letter was in these terms :

“DEAR SIR, — We enclose the little work which has occasioned you so much perplexity, and we trust that when you have looked it over we shall still retain your good opinion.

“It was written by a sincere admirer of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, by a person who has been his advocate in every place where he found opportunity of expressing an opinion on the subject, and we really think that when the original poem is published he will feel all the intense regard for the beauties which distinguishes the true lover of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry. The immediate cause of his writing this burlesque imitation of the ‘Idiot Boy’ was the announcement of a new poem with so untimely a title as that of ‘Peter Bell.’ He thought that all Mr.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Wordsworth's excellencies might be displayed in some work which should be free from those ridiculous associations which vulgar names give rise to, and as a Friend he felt vexed that unnecessary obstacles were thus again thrown in the way of Mr. Wordsworth's popularity.

"You do not know the author, nor are we at liberty to mention his name. There was no *malice prepense* in the undertaking, we can assure you, for we happen to know that it was written in five hours after he first thought of such a thing, and it was printed in as many more. He never heard a line of the original poem, nor did he know that it was in existence till he saw the name in the advertisement.

"We are placed in a situation which enables us to see the effect of those peculiarities which this writer wishes Mr. Wordsworth to renounce, and we must say that they grieve his friends, gladden his adversaries, and are the chief, if not the only, impediments to the favourable reception of his poems among all classes of readers."

Coleridge's reply to this admirable letter from Messrs. Taylor and Hessey is not dated, but he seems to have sent it as speedily as an attack of influenza would allow him. There are many

points of interest in his letter, not the least being the expression of his opinion on the prose parts of Reynolds's squib.

“DEAR SIRs,—The influenza, which is at present going about, has honoured me with its particular attention, in the form of fever, weight in my limbs, and this from the day I received your letter and the ‘True Simon Pure.’ Tho’ I write with difficulty, I will not longer delay to assure you that I would not have subjected myself to the possible charge of impertinent interference, had I then been aware that Mr. Wordsworth’s poem had been announced publicly, for it is now many years since I have been in correspondence with him by letters. It is, according to my principles, ALL FAIR. The satirist pretends to know nothing of the author but what he has drawn from his printed works, and implies nothing against his person and character. All else is matter of taste. I laughed heartily at *all the prose*, notes included, and am confident should have done so and yet more heartily had I been myself the barb of the joke. The writer, however, ought (as a man, I mean) to recollect that Mr. Wordsworth for full 16 years had been assailed, weekly, monthly, and

LITERARY BY-PATHS

quarterly, with every species of wanton detraction and contempt; that my 'Literary life' was the first critique which, acknowledging and explaining his faults (as a *poet*), weighed them fairly against his merits (and is there a poet now alive who will pretend to believe himself equal in genius to Wordsworth?); that during all these years Mr. Wordsworth made no answer, displayed no resentment; and, lastly, that from Cicero to Luther, Giordano Bruno, Milton, Dryden, Wolfe, John Brown, Hunter, etc., etc., I know but *one* instance (that of Benedict Spinoza) of a man of great genius and original mind who on those very accounts had been abused, misunderstood, decried and (as far as the several ages permitted) persecuted, who has not been worried at last with a semblance of Egotism. The verdict of Justice is ever the same, as to the quantum of credit due to a man comparatively—if the whole or perhaps more than the whole is given to a man by his contemporaries generally what wonder if he feels little temptation to claim any in his own name?

"As to the poem of the satirist, it seems to me like many of its predecessors of the same sort. A. we are to suppose writes like a simpleton; and B. writes tenfold more simpletonish—

IN OLD ENGLAND

ergo B.'s wilful idiocy is a *witty* satire on A.'s childishness! At the best this is but mimicry, buffoonery, not satire. When a man can imitate even stupidly the blunders of a Dogberry so as to render them, as Shakespeare does, the vehicles of the most exquisite sense — this is indeed wit! But be the verses what they may, they are all mostly fair, and the preface and notes are very droll and clever."

A word or two may be devoted to rounding off the history of the "Peter Bell" poems. Wordsworth, it should be noted, did not regard the parody from the standpoint of Coleridge; his lack of humour prevented that; and so far from laughing heartily over any part of the book, it gave him great offence. Keats wrote a characteristic review of Reynolds's effort, quoting a few verses and some of the prose notes, and it was this review which aroused Shelley's interest in the matter, and led to the writing of his "Peter Bell the Third." That title must have puzzled many readers who were ignorant of Reynolds's "Peter Bell," the "ante-natal Peter," as Shelley christened it.

When the letters from Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, given above, are considered in

LITERARY BY-PATHS

their cumulative judgment of Reynolds's literary gifts ; when it is recalled that Byron thought his "Peter Bell" was the work of Moore ; when we remember that his collaboration with Thomas Hood in the "Odes and Addresses to Great People" resulted in a volume which Coleridge was certain had been written by Lamb ; and when we are reminded that in a later work, "The Garden of Florence," Reynolds showed a marked ripening of his literary gifts, we are tempted to wonder what mischance of fate has prevented him from surviving in English literature save as the friend of Keats. After all, we must not judge too harshly the contemporaneous reception of Keats's first two volumes. Bringing to his early work the prejudice in his favour which his later and riper verse has created, we cannot enter fully into the feelings of those who had only the "Poems" of 1817 and "Endymion" before them. It may seem rash to aver that but for the "Lamia" volume Keats's name would indeed have been written in water, and yet that is a conclusion which can hardly be avoided by any one who compares the "Poems" and "Endymion" with the best work of Reynolds. It is true that even the earliest work of Keats has here and there streaks of the fine ore

of his own peculiar genius, but in its total effect it hardly reaches a much higher level than Reynolds attained. But to discuss this question would be too lengthy a task. Reynolds was one of the many — perhaps the best equipped of the many — of those friends of Keats who seemed to have received the call of the Muse. Yet only one was chosen. And Reynolds would not have had it otherwise. “I,” wrote Keats to Reynolds, “have been getting more and more close to you, every day, since I knew you;” to Jane Reynolds he wrote that henceforth he should consider her brother John his own brother also; and in the last letter he penned, when the death dews were gathering on his brow in far-off Rome, he turned in tender thought to the friend he loved and told how he could not write to him because it was not possible to send a good account of his health. Reynolds did not fail of equal affection. “I set my heart,” he wrote to Keats, “on having you high, as you ought to be. Do *you* get Fame, and I shall have it in being your affectionate and steady friend.” Both those desires have been fulfilled. So long as the pathetic story of John Keats is told in English literature, fame will not be wanting for his friend John Hamilton Reynolds.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Tempted by the interest attaching to the above-quoted letters from Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and by the opportunity they afforded of doing some justice to the memory of Keats's best and wisest friend, other friends of the poet have been lost sight of for the time. Before

10		Keene Andrew	12 Mos
14		Kellett Richd	12 Mos
Oct 30	1813	Kingstone Fran	12
Feb 21	1814	Key Charles Aston	12
Oct 1	1815	Keats John	6
		(1821)	12
9		Kellock Wm	6

RECORD IN THE PUPIL'S ENTRY BOOK OF GUY'S HOSPITAL, LONDON

returning to them, however, something may be attempted towards setting at rest several points relating to the career of Keats as a medical student.

When the poet had reached his fifteenth year, his self-willed guardian, Mr. Richard Abbey, decided that he should be bound apprentice to Mr. Thomas Hammond, an apothecary at Edmonton, and because Keats left Mr. Ham-

mond before the natural term of his apprenticeship it has always been concluded that some serious estrangement arose between the two. This conclusion appears to have been based solely on an expression used by Keats when, wishing to illustrate the changes which take place in the tissues of the human body, he said,

John Keats	55	1814	1814
Mr. Spencer	58	1814	1814
Henry Foster	61	1814	1814
Edward Hickman	62	1814	1814
Herbert Allen	64	1814	1814
Thomas Tichler	66	1814	1814

RECORD IN THE PUPILS' ENTRY BOOK OF GUY'S HOSPITAL, LONDON

“Seven years ago it was not this hand which clenched itself at Hammond.” This appears to be but a slight foundation upon which to found a theory of a quarrel, especially when documentary records of the poet's student days are taken into account. Those records also seem to throw some light on the date at which Keats entered upon a further study of the medical profession at Guy's Hospital, London. He is supposed to have gone thither in the fall of 1814, whereas the records in

question reveal that it was not until the fall of the following year. An examination of the records at Guy's shows that the authorities in those days were in the habit of keeping duplicate books of the entries of pupils, the one being in alphabetical and the other in chronological order. Now both these Pupils' Entry Books agree, as will be seen from the reproductions, in giving the name of John Keats under the date of October 1st, 1815, and each shows that the office fee paid was £1. 2. 0. That Keats did not begin his hospital attendance prior to October 1st, 1815, is also proved by an examination of the records of the Apothecaries' Hall, London, an extract from which is reproduced in these pages for the first time. This excerpt illustrates several points. It shows, for one thing, that Keats passed his examination with credit, — "Examined by Mr. Brande and approved" is the endorsement, — also that up to that time he had only had a hospital attendance of six months at Guy's and St. Thomas's. As the date of the certificate is July 25th, 1816, it proves conclusively that Keats did not begin his hospital career in 1814 as Mr. Sidney Colvin asserts. Again, in addition to recording the actual courses attended by Keats, the certificate also bears that the young student

IN OLD ENGLAND

came to his examination armed with a testimonial from Mr. Hammond, and that fact should do something towards destroying the "quarrel" theory. It only remains to be added that the reference in one of the Guy's records to a further

July 25th 1816.

1809 MR. John Keats offered as a CANDIDATE for
a CERTIFICATE to practise as an APOTHECARY in the County.

As APPRENTICE to Mr. Thomas Hammond of Edmonton
APOTHECARY for 5 Years.

TESTIMONIAL from Mr. Thos Hammond

LECTURES.

2 COURSES ON ANATOMY and PHYSIOLOGY.
2 ——— THEORY and PRACTICE of MEDICINE.
2 ——— CHEMISTRY.
1 ——— MATERIA MEDICA.

HOSPITAL ATTENDANCE.

6 MONTHS at Guy's & St. Thomas's
as
MONTHS at

168 Examined by Mr. Board & Appraised

EXTRACT FROM THE REGISTER OF APOTHECARIES' HALL, LONDON

twelve-months course by Keats under a "Mr. L." is explained by the fact that on March 3d, 1816, he was appointed a "dresser of surgeons" under Mr. Lucas. On that occasion he paid a fee of £25. 4. 0, of which £6. 6. 0 was returned, probably owing to his discovery that he was unfit for

LITERARY BY-PATHS

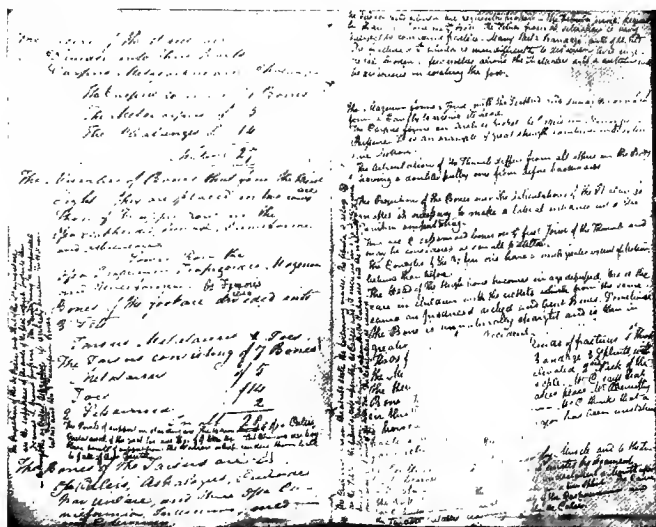
the profession and his consequent resolve to seek his life occupation in some other sphere.

Owing to some of his fellow-students having given their reminiscences to the world, it is sometimes imagined that Keats did not follow his medical tuition with any great zest. One such has recorded that "in the lecture-room he seemed to sit apart, and to be absorbed in something else, as if the subject suggested thoughts to him which were not practically connected with it. He was often in the subject, and out of it, in a dreamy way;" and another, in a somewhat similar strain, asserted "even in the lecture-room of St. Thomas's, I have seen Keats in a deep poetic dream: his mind was on Parnassus with the muses." It is more than probable that these recollections were coloured by the knowledge of what Keats eventually became. At any rate, one interesting souvenir of his student days is preserved among the precious relics belonging to Sir Charles W. Dilke in the form of a notebook, and these closely-written pages are witness to anything save a wandering mind. Besides, did he not, in those terrible last days at Rome, harrow the spirit of the faithful Severn with a minute diagnosis of his own malady, showing thereby that it was not with inattentive mind he

IN OLD ENGLAND

had listened to the lectures of his professors some six years before?

Although John Taylor stood to Keats in the relation of his publisher, he was in addition one



KEATS'S NOTE-BOOK AS MEDICAL STUDENT

of his best and most generous friends. On many occasions he gave him the practical aid of his purse, allowing him to draw at will upon him even for work still to be done. For the last journey to Rome, Mr. Taylor smoothed the path of Keats by handing him £100 for the copyright of "Endymion," and when he and Severn were

LITERARY BY-PATHS

at their wit's end for fresh supplies they were rescued by the arrival of a remittance due entirely to Mr. Taylor's thoughtful kindness.

As was the custom in the early part of the last century, the premises of Messrs. Taylor and Hessey at 93 Fleet Street, London, were partly devoted to business and partly to residential purposes. The shop and storerooms of their publishing business occupied the front of the house in Fleet Street itself, but the rooms at the back, overlooking the graveyard of St. Bride's Church, were, in Keats's days, used by Mr. Taylor as his own home, his partner, Mr. Hessey, living elsewhere. To this Fleet Street building came many of the choice spirits of that time, including Hazlitt, Lamb, Reynolds, Allan Cunningham, and, of course, Keats ; and those old windows which used to look out on the quiet graves of St. Bride's many a time shook with the merriment of those convivial gatherings. On other occasions Keats was more than a temporary guest here, for Mr. Taylor seems always to have had a spare bedroom to place at his friend's disposal. Within the last decade, considerable alterations in Fleet Street have resulted in the demolition of this house of such interesting memories, and it is believed there is no other record of it in existence apart



THE BACK OF MR. TAYLOR'S FLEET STREET HOUSE

IN OLD ENGLAND

from the photograph reproduced in these pages, which was taken only a short time before the building was condemned.

Among the numerous portraits of Keats it may be questioned whether any is regarded with greater general favour than the one by Severn, which shows the poet in his study at Hampstead, for this seems somehow to suggest the dreamy, poetic atmosphere in which he conceived his matchless "Ode to a Nightingale." Much attention has been devoted recently to the question of Keats portraiture, but the subject is by no means exhausted. All writers on this matter appear to have entirely overlooked the remark of Cowden Clarke — no mean judge, by the way — that the portrait of Wouvermans by Rembrandt in the Dulwich Gallery is a "curiously unconscious likeness" of Keats. Again, the same early friend calls attention to the portrait showing him with one leg over the knee of the other, smoothing the instep with the palm of his hand. "In that action," says Clarke, "I mostly associate him in eager parley with Leigh Hunt in his little Vale of Health cottage." This interesting portrait remains to be published, though not discovered.

In the sadly chequered life of Keats there is no space which seems to shine so brightly with

LITERARY BY-PATHS

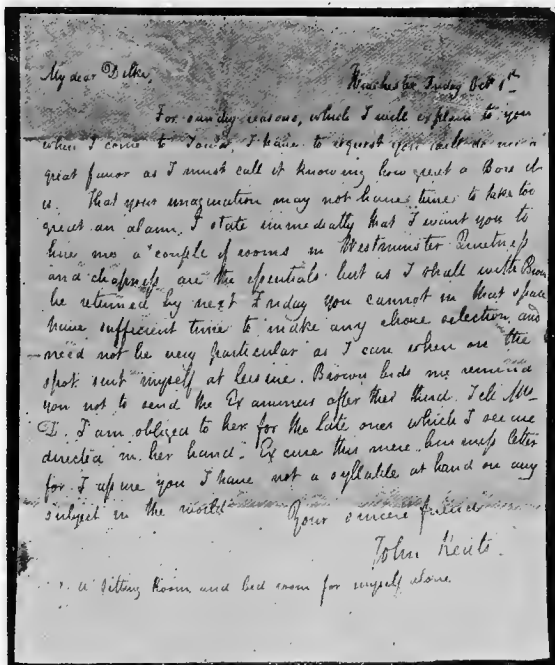
the mingled rays of possible restoration to health and happy work as the few weeks he spent at Winchester with Charles Brown. "The old cathedral city, with its peaceful closes breathing antiquity, its clear-coursing streams and beautiful elm-shadowed meadow walks, and the nimble, and pure air of its surrounding downs, exactly suited Keats, who quickly improved both in health and spirits. The days which he spent here were the last good days of his life." Under the influence of this deceptive flicker, he came to that resolve to make the plunge into a London life of journalism. Hence the letter to his friend Dilke, begging him to secure a "couple of rooms in Westminster. Quietness and cheapness are the essentials." As Keats was following his letter in a few days, Dilke had little time to make such choice, and this, together with his evident desire to have the poet near him, accounts for him taking the necessary rooms in Great College Street, Westminster, within a stone's throw of his own home. Even after nearly a hundred years, it would be difficult to imagine a thoroughfare more suited to the needs of Keats. Though in the heart of London it is not of it. Down one side runs the high wall of the gardens of Westminster Abbey, and from



KEATS IN HIS STUDY AT HAMPSTEAD

IN OLD ENGLAND

the upper windows of the old-fashioned houses on the opposite side of the street there are unique views of that historic building. This was



LETTER FROM KEATS TO DILKE

as near a reproduction of the restful calm of Winchester as all London could furnish. Here, if anywhere, the poet would find fit environment for the literary work to which he thought he had braced himself.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

But Keats's days of peace and work were alike numbered. In London, he was within easy reach of Fanny Brawne again, and to be near her was to have no rest save when in her actual presence. "I can think of nothing else," he wrote; "I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again — my life seems to stop there — I see no further." This mood was fatal to his scheme of a diligent life in his quiet rooms at Westminster; so the hastily taken lodgings were as quickly abandoned, and thenceforward, in the close neighbourhood of the home of his disturbing mistress, the last sad act in the tragedy of this ill-fated spirit moved onwards to its solemn close.

As a final hope, his friends and doctors urged trial of a winter in Italy, and he sailed for Naples on September 18th, 1820, in the company of the devoted Severn. Even in the matter of the vessel in which that voyage in hope was made, the ill fate of Keats did not desert him. Though all visible representation of the "Maria Crowther," the boat in question, has long disappeared, enquiry at Lloyd's has elicited several interesting particulars. It has been stated that the ship was ill adapted for the conveyance of passengers, and that such was quite literally the

IN OLD ENGLAND

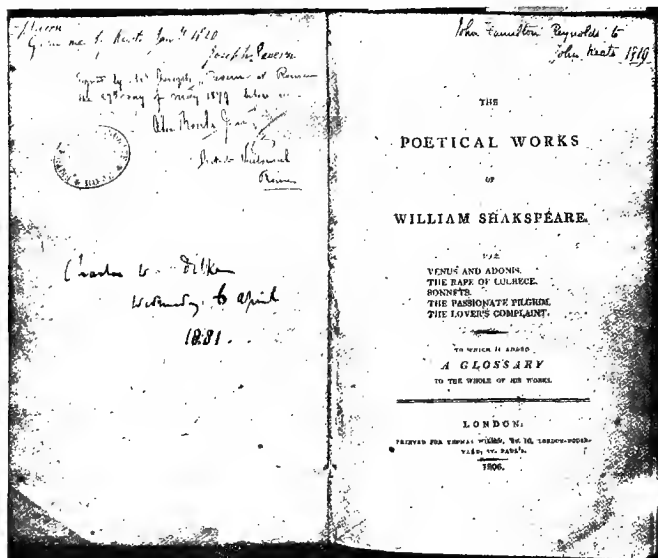


GREAT COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER

. case may be inferred from the fact that she was only of 127 tons register. In the technical language of the shipwright, she was "Brigantine

LITERARY BY-PATHS

rig, with standing bowsprit, square stern, carvel built, and eagle's-head figurehead." The "Maria Crowther" was built at Chester in 1810, and was primarily intended merely to trade between Cardiff and Liverpool. Probably the voyage to

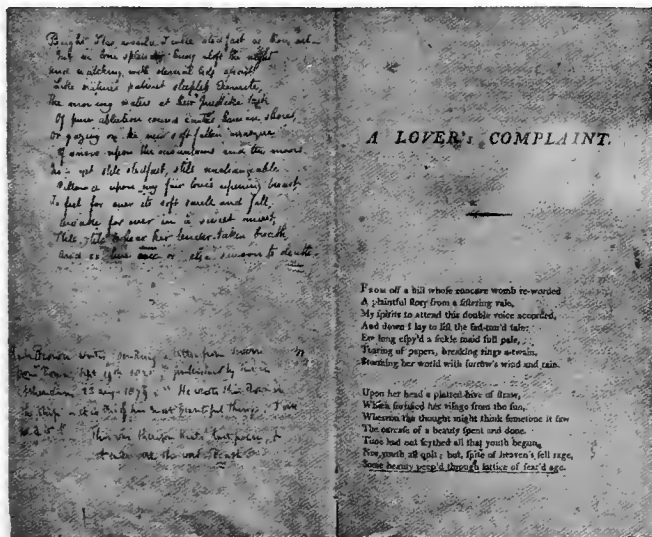


KEATS'S COPY OF SHAKESPEARE

Naples was only a temporary departure from her usual route, for later she evidently returned to the St. George's Channel trade, and the vessel was wrecked off the Isle of Man on November 7th, 1837. It seems that the name of the captain of the ship was Robert Dawes, and that he

IN OLD ENGLAND

never realised the part he had played in the life-history of Keats is indicated by the fact that none of his descendants remember him to have remarked on his having had the poet for a passenger. It was from the "Maria Crowther"



KEATS'S LAST SONNET

that Keats penned that pathetic letter to his friend Brown in which he wrote: "Land and sea, weakness and decline, are the great separators, but Death is the great divorcer for ever."

Among the few books he took with him on this voyage Keats included a copy of Shakespeare's

Poems, the gift of his good friend Reynolds. In that old folio volume there are two intensely interesting double pages. The first are at its commencement, and while the right-hand leaf records the original gift of the volume, the left-hand page perpetuates how it was presented by Keats to Severn a few weeks before the end, and in 1881 passed into the possession of Sir Charles W. Dilke, the grandson of one of the poet's warmest friends. If, now, the volume is opened at the beginning of "A Lover's Complaint," the opposite page will be seen to bear a sonnet in the familiar handwriting of Keats. This was his last message to the world.

Retarded on the voyage down the English Channel by adverse winds, the "Maria Crowther" cast anchor off Lulworth Cove, and thus Keats was able to enjoy yet one more day on the soil of that land which was so soon to fade from his eyes for ever. Returning to the ship in a mood of solemn calm, he, that night, with thoughts which winged their way once more to his betrothed, and with vision fixed upon some radiant point in the clear autumnal heavens above, found his rare inspiration return yet once again. To few poets has it been given to crown their work with such perfect lines, or to enshrine

IN OLD ENGLAND

the memory of their love with their latest singing breath.

“Bright star ! would I were steadfast as thou art —
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature’s patient sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors : —
No — yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest ;
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever, — or else swoon to death.”

IX

IN CARLYLE'S COUNTRY

IX

IN CARLYLE'S COUNTRY

"No surer does the Auldgarth bridge, that his father helped to build, carry the traveller over the turbulent water beneath it, than Carlyle's books convey the reader over chasms and confusions, where before there was no way, or only an inadequate one."

JOHN BURROUGHS.

A SMALL and sleepy Annandale town, a quiet road in Chelsea by the side of the Thames — these are the shrines sought out with affectionate solicitude by the disciples of Thomas Carlyle. Each shrine in its way affords the pilgrim much satisfaction of spirit. Ecclefechan and the surrounding country fit in, somehow, with one's previous anticipations of what Carlyle's native place should be: Cheyne Row, with its atmosphere of solid comfort and stability, seems to keep harmony with the victorious life-struggle which took end there in the winter of 1881.

A native of the village where Carlyle was born, aware of my intention to visit that spot, offered the forbidding warning, "Don't go to Ecclefechan expecting to find worshippers of Carlyle."

LITERARY BY-PATHS

The warning was not unneeded ; for than Ecclefechan there surely never was a spot where was more literally fulfilled the proverb, " A prophet is not without honour save in his own country." Not once, but many times while plying the natives with questions, I was greeted with the astonishing query, "*Which* Carlyle?" There is a tradition in the district that an old roadman, now dead, happening to be addressed by a party of Carlyle devotees, ran over the names of the various members of the family, and dwelt with special emphasis upon that of Sandy, " who was a rare breeder o' sows." " But there was one called Thomas, you know," rejoined the eager pilgrims. " Ay," retorted the old roadman, " there was Tam ; he gaed awa' up to London, but I dinna think he ever did muckle guid."

Vain indeed, then, is the search of the man who goes to Ecclefechan on the lookout for worshippers of Carlyle. And, seemingly, it all arises from the utilitarian way the natives have of regarding the most famous member of the Carlyle family. A mild remonstrance addressed to the hotel-keeper on his lack of appreciation in not at least hanging a portrait of the sage in his public room only elicited the grumbling reply, " What did *he* do for the village?" Annandale



ÉCCLEFECHAN

IN OLD ENGLAND

people are slow to believe any generosity of Thomas Carlyle. If you remind them that he gave Craigenputtock to Edinburgh University, they will answer, "It's the only thing he did give away;" and if you tell them of his many private benefactions to struggling authors — such as those £5 notes to Thomas Cooper with the remark, "If you don't pay me again I'll not hang you" — they only stare at you with that hard, unbelieving look of theirs. Gifts of the right hand unknown of the left are not held in honour in Ecclefechan.

Ecclefechan is not an attractive village. In the olden days when a double row of beech trees grew by the side of the open burn which ran down the middle of the street, it may have been more picturesque, yet even in those days Burns could describe it as an "unfortunate, wicked little village." The beech trees are gone now, and only a small part of the burn remains uncovered, the latter change being explained by an iron tablet in the village, bearing this inscription:—

" 1875

209 feet of the Burn below this spot was arched over by Dr. George Arnott at his own expense."

In approaching Ecclefechan from the railway station, the pilgrim enters the village by the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

north end; and in that case the house in which Carlyle was born must be looked for on the right hand. The accompanying view of this house was taken from the south end of the village, both



ARCH HOUSE, ECCLEFECHAN

its best, and because it gave the camera the fairest chance to secure a good picture. Hence the Carlyle house is seen on the left; and just above it the burn flows from under that archway

erected by Dr. George Arnott "at his own expense."

Although built more than a hundred years ago, the house in which Carlyle was born, called Arch House on account of the wide archway running from front to back, shows no sign of decay. It was built by Carlyle's father, an honest mason, who left off rearing houses when the old taste for substantial buildings went out of fashion. "Nothing that he undertook to do," witnessed Carlyle, "but he did it faith-

IN OLD ENGLAND

fully and like a true man. I shall look on the houses he built with a certain proud interest.



ROOM IN WHICH CARLYLE WAS BORN

They stand firm and sound to the heart all over his little district. No one that comes after him will say ‘Here was the finger of a hollow eye servant.’”

LITERARY BY-PATHS

The tiny room in which Carlyle was born — it is at the top of the house in the right-hand corner of the picture — is devoted now to the housing of some interesting mementos of the infant who drew his first breath there on December 4th, 1795. In one corner an unpretentious bookcase holds a copy of the familiar brown-covered “People’s Edition” of his writings; a recess near by is filled with bits of old china from the house in Cheyne Row; on the mantelpiece are two turned wooden candlesticks, a gift of John Sterling, sent from Rome; a table in the corner provides a resting-place for the philosopher’s reading-lamp and tea-caddy; and above a framed letter on the south wall two of his hats are hung. More attention is paid to these hats than to any of the other relics. What higher happiness can the hero-worshipper wish than the being able to say he has had his head inside Carlyle’s hat? *Inside* it goes, in a quite literal sense. Up to the time of my visit only twenty-nine heads had been found to fit that hat. I regret to add that mine did not make the thirtieth. All this applies especially to one hat — a black, wide-brimmed soft felt, perhaps the identical hat which prompted the immortal dialogue between the passenger and the ’bus driver.

IN OLD ENGLAND

“ Queer ’at that old fellow ’ad who just got in.”

“ Queer ’at ! ay, he may wear a queer ’at, but what would you give for the ’edpiece that’s inside of it ? ”

The other hat, just as broad-brimmed, but straw instead of felt, is none too large for an ordinary cranium, — a fact not without its consolatory side.

Not far from the hats there is a frame of portraits of Carlyle and his wife, somewhat roughly mounted, but of exceptional interest. Of Carlyle there are six portraits ; of his wife, four. One of the portraits of Carlyle, that bearing the date 1845, ranks among the earliest likenesses of him extant, and has a considerable resemblance to that crayon drawing by Samuel Lawrence, of which Carlyle thought so highly that he commended it to Emerson as the one most suitable for a frontispiece to the American edition of his works. While all the portraits of Carlyle here have a considerable resemblance to one another and harmonise with most of the portraits that have been made of him, those of his wife which find a place in this frame, while consistent with each other, have little or nothing in common with that graceful and handsome young lady

LITERARY BY-PATHS

who figures in the second volume of Carlyle's "Early Letters." In these portraits Mrs. Carlyle's face recalls that of George Eliot. The brow is high and massive, the eyes deep sunk and sad, the mouth large and cynical. If Mrs. Carlyle was ever like her Edinburgh portrait of 1826, she must have changed amazingly ; if these later portraits represent any physiognomic continuity, the artist of the Edinburgh portrait must have falsified amazingly. One of the photographs of Mrs. Carlyle shows her standing behind a velvet-covered chair, on which her dog "Nero" is reclining at ease ; and another photograph of that small quadruped who was her sole companion on the ride from which she returned dead may be seen in a different part of the room.

In the visitors' book at the hotel in Ecclefechan I found abundant evidence that America still takes a zealous interest in the author of "Sartor Resartus." To more than one American name I found the legend appended : "On a pilgrimage to Carlyle's country ;" and, as was most appropriate, I noticed that in the room where Carlyle was born, signs of that interest were not lacking. On the table there lay a substantial volume of the ledger type, bearing this inscription : —

IN OLD ENGLAND

“Visitors’ Book at the Birthplace and Grave of Thomas Carlyle. Presented to Mr. Peter Scott of Ecclefechan, Scotland, by Joseph Cook, of Boston, Massachusetts, March 20, 1881.”

In looking at the Arch House from the opposite side of the road, the spire of the United Presbyterian Church is a conspicuous object in the background at the right. On the other side of that spire is the Ecclefechan kirkyard, where Thomas Carlyle is buried. So do the beginnings and ends of things meet, — here the room memorable for his birth, there the kirkyard memorable for his grave. That spire brings to memory a Carlyle story told me in the district. Carlyle’s father and the family in general were adherents of a dissenting congregation known as the Seceders or Associate Congregation. But in 1847, these and other dissenters formed themselves into the United Presbyterian Church ; and henceforward the Carlyle family were reckoned among its members. By and by the newly named congregation addressed itself to the erection of a new church, and Carlyle’s brother James promised a contribution of £50 to the building. That £50 was never paid. Whether James Carlyle made his promise in good faith none can tell ; but it is affirmed that the erection of the spire was made the pretext on his part for

declining to keep his promise. So the spire cost £50 more than its contract price. Nor was that all. The incident terminated by James Carlyle and his family leaving the United Presbyterian Church and becoming members of the Church of Scotland congregation at Middlevie.

Changes take place so slowly in Scottish villages that the Ecclefechan of to-day differs but little from the Ecclefechan of Carlyle's boyhood. Buildings once put to one purpose are now put to another; otherwise they remain now as then. So it happens that the humble building in which Carlyle laid the foundation of his education is still standing, though not now used as a school. One end abuts against the side of the United Presbyterian Church; the other merges into the wall of the kirkyard where Carlyle is buried. Utilised now as a dwelling-house, it is easy to recall the days when it was the *academia* of the district,—so close is its likeness to many a building in other Scottish villages still devoted to educational uses. Little is remembered of Carlyle's earliest school-days; and indeed it is hardly to be expected that a boy of five would furnish much pabulum for the biographer. A few years ago there died in Ecclefechan an aged lady who claimed to have attended this school with

IN OLD ENGLAND

Carlyle; but her reminiscences did not go beyond that bare fact. The purpose of Carlyle's father in sending him to this school, and afterward to Annan Academy and Edinburgh University is well known; he had the desire of



CARLYLE'S FIRST SCHOOLHOUSE

every Scottish parent to see his son "wag his pow in a pu'pit." Of course the worthy man was woefully disappointed when his son found that such an occupation was impossible for him; but in this, as in so many other unpleasant matters, he consumed his own smoke. "His tolerance for me," says Carlyle, "his trust in me was

LITERARY BY-PATHS

great. When I declined going forward into the church though his heart was set upon it, he respected my scruples, my volition, and patiently let me have my way."

This self-denial becomes more noteworthy in the light of an anecdote related to me in Ecclefechan. It had become known in the village that "Tom Carlyle" was destined for the Kirk and the village gossips were always pressing old James Carlyle with the awkward question, "Why is not Tom coming out for the Kirk?" Now the old man was too proud to own his disappointment to the village gossips, and so one day, when the question was more pointedly put than usual, he rejoined, "Do you think oor Tam is going to stand up and be criticised by a man like Matthie Latimer?" — the said Matthie Latimer being an argumentative theologian of the meeting-house, who was always ready with his remarks upon the pulpit performances gone through there.

The fate which has befallen the schoolhouse has also overtaken the old meeting-house where in the early days of last century the young Carlyle heard many an orthodox and long-winded discourse. He never forgot those childish experiences. "Poor temple of my childhood," he

IN OLD ENGLAND

wrote sixty years after, "to me more sacred at this moment than perhaps the biggest cathedral then extant could have been: rude, rustic, bare,—no temple in the world was more so,—but there were sacred lambencies, tongues of



THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE, ECCLEFECHAN

authentic flame from heaven which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out." It is marvellous to note how vivid Carlyle's recollections were of the serious-faced peasants who used to frequent that old meeting-house; even when his own long life was drawing to a close he could paint their portraits down to

the smallest detail of dress. Even given such a remarkable eye as he had for grasping the minutest idiosyncracies of personal appearance, he must have enjoyed some favourable coign of vantage from which to view those old Seceders, Sunday by Sunday. And such he had ; for I learned that the Carlyle seat was in the gallery of the meeting-house, from whence the bulk of worshippers could be carefully surveyed.

Strongly attached as old James Carlyle was to the Seceders, a trivial incident in the history of the congregation cut him adrift from them for a time. It happened that a new manse was to be built for the minister, and there arose a division of opinion as to the number of rooms it should contain, — James Carlyle voting in favour of such a minimum as seemed consistent with a creed which laid more emphasis on the next world than on this. His views, however, were not those of the majority ; and to mark his disapproval of such a worldly policy as was implied in the erection of too spacious a manse, he left the communion for a time. With characteristic Scottish forethought, the old Seceders had several flues placed in their meeting-house at the time of its erection, in anticipation of the day when the congregation should either dwindle

away or by the erection of a new building should find it necessary to dispose of the old one. It was the latter contingency which arose, and the old meeting-house, by reason of its flues, was easily transformed into a number of tenements.

Whatever may have been Carlyle's opinion of ministers in general, he cherished very affectionately the memory of that aged minister of the meeting-house who baptised him, preached to him, visited his father's house, and taught him Latin. "John Johnstone," he said, "was the priestliest man I ever under any ecclesiastical guise was privileged to look upon. . . . He sleeps not far from my father in the Ecclefechan churchyard; the teacher and the taught. 'Blessed,' I again say, 'are the dead that die in the Lord. They do rest from their labours; their works follow them.'" The monument over the grave of this worthy man was built by Carlyle's father, and it is an admirable example of the sterling honesty of his work as a mason. It is generally believed in Ecclefechan that the inscription on the monument was composed by Carlyle himself, and even if that were not the case it is worth preserving for the picture it gives of a remarkable man:—

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“ All that was mortal of
The Revd. John Johnstone,
Minister of the Associate Congregation.
Ecclefechan,
rests here in hope of the resurrection of life.
He was born A.D. 1730.
He was ordained A.D. 1760.
He died May 28th, A.D. 1812,
in the 82nd year of his age and the 52nd of his
ministry.
Endowed with strong natural talents
Which were
cultivated by a liberal education
And sanctified by Divine influence
He was
As a scholar respectable
As a theologian learned
And as a minister able, faithful and laborious.”

When the mason trade deteriorated to such an extent that honest work went out of fashion, James Carlyle turned to the occupation of farming, “ that so he might keep all his family about him.” The first farm he took was that known as Mainhill, situated on the great north road, about two miles from Ecclefechan. Here the Carlyles lived from 1815 to 1826. It was not a desirable farm at that time ; “ a wet, clayey spot ; ” Carlyle describes it, “ a place of horrid drudgery,” and in 1825 he writes to his brother Alexander : “ I hope my father will not think of

IN OLD ENGLAND

burdening himself further with Mainhill and its plashy soil when the lease has expired."

Two anecdotes of the Mainhill days told me in the district throw a little light upon the domestic history of the family at that period. An old man, Peter Scott by name, who served on the farm at Mainhill as a lad, told my informant that



MAINHILL

when his day's work was done he took a seat by the kitchen fire and "held my head down, for fear ane o' them wad begin on me." All the Carlyles alike, with the possible exception of the mother, were noted and feared and hated in Ecclefechan for their caustic tongues; and this incident of the serving lad holding his head down for fear one of the family might begin on him throws that hatred into sharp relief.

The other anecdote concerns the father alone,

and is valuable as indicating the origin of Carlyle's apostrophising habit. A gang of saw-millers had put up at Mainhill, increasing to an unusual size the company which gathered round the old man when he conducted family worship. His consecutive reading had brought him to that chapter of Genesis where Potiphar's wife figures so infamously with Joseph, and he read it through with his severest enunciation, closing the book with emphatic action as he shouted, "And thou wast a b—!" — a coarse canine word which seems to have been often on his lips.

When his wife was in that unsettled mental state which ultimately prompted her removal from home for a short time, she did a deed that afterwards grieved and appalled herself. Seeing the old man stooping with a pail for water at the well, she stole forward and pushed him bodily in. Then in a state of mortal terror she rushed into the house, expecting him to well-nigh slay her in an ungovernable passion. To her amazement, however, when she was singing at the pitch of her voice in the pretence of fearing him not, he entered quite calmly and saluted her with, "Well, thou art a merry b—!"

The wife of the present tenant of Mainhill was kind enough to show me over the house, pointing

out the rooms which were in existence when the Carlyles lived there, and the additions which had been made since. Mr. J. A. Froude informed me that in my photograph Mainhill is twice the size it used to be ; and he added that Carlyle always had unpleasant remembrances of that place. The chief addition to the house is the two-storied wing which occupies the foreground of the picture, other alterations in the rear not affecting the size of the building so much as its convenience.

At one period in the early life of Carlyle, when the church, law, and tutoring had each failed to provide him with an occupation, it occurred to him that he might solve the problem of his life by taking a small farm in his native district, where he could study and write in peace, while one of his brothers attended to the practical work of the holding. "A house in the country, and a horse to ride on, I must and will have if it is possible." This was the message which set the Mainhill people on the lookout ; and soon they were able to report that in the small farm of Hoddam Hill they had secured the place he needed. Accordingly Carlyle took possession of Hoddam Hill farm at the Whitsunday term, 1825, his mother going with him

LITERARY BY-PATHS

as housekeeper, and his brother Alick as practical farmer.

For a wonder, considering the nature of the man, Carlyle was perfectly satisfied with the place. "I have been to see the place," he wrote Miss Welsh, "and I like it well so far as I am interested in it. There is a good house where I may establish myself in comfortable quarters. The views from it are superb. There are hard smooth roads to gallop on towards any point of the compass, and ample space to dig and prune under the pure canopy of a wholesome sky. The ancient Tower of Repentance stands in a corner of the farm, a fit memorial for reflecting sinners." This was Carlyle's first impression of the farm; nor did occupancy prove that distance had lent enchantment to the view. "We live here on our hill-top, enjoying a degree of solitude that might content the great Zimmermann himself. Few mortals come to visit us, I go to visit none." Long years after he could recall the spot with feelings of unmixed pleasure. "Hoddam Hill," he wrote in his "Reminiscences," "was a neat, compact little farm, rent £100, which my father had leased for me, on which was a prettyish little cottage for dwelling-house; and from the window such a view (fifty miles in radius from beyond

IN OLD ENGLAND

Tyndale to beyond St. Bees, Solway Firth, and all the fells to Ingleborough inclusive) as Britain or the world could hardly have matched."

At the present time the Carlyle pilgrim has considerable difficulty in finding Hoddam Hill, — the fact of the philosopher's tenancy of that spot having faded from the local memory.

All my questions were answered with stolid negatives. I must mean Mainhill. Even a man who had lived on the estate all



HODDAM HILL

his life was ignorant that Carlyle once rented one of its farms. A twofold explanation offers of this somewhat surprising fact. Carlyle occupied the farm only for a year; and the local name for the house appears to be "The Hill" rather than "Hoddam Hill."

If additional proof were wanted of the indifference with which Carlyle is regarded in Annandale, it might be adduced from the deplorable condition of the house in which he lived at Hoddam Hill. The front door has been blocked up, and the building so divided internally that it

LITERARY BY-PATHS

now provides shelter for two labourers' families. When I saw the place it was in a condition that would have been disgraceful had the building been used as a pig-sty. Mud and dirt were plentiful in all directions; heaps of rubbish made walking a gymnastic exercise; fences were broken down and gates lay prostrate; and unwashed and unkempt children looked out from the doorways.

Carlyle may have had some ideas of settling down at Hoddam Hill. It was a delightful spot, and admirably adapted to the case of a man who needed perfect quiet and unlimited fresh air. But it was not to be. He was himself, however, I believe, to blame for starting the sequence of events which led to his removal. It happened in this way. Carlyle rode a great deal at Hoddam; and one day the laird's wife, Mrs. Sharpe, was walking gently down the hill near Repentance Tower, when he passed her on his horse. As soon as he got in front of her he put his horse to the gallop with such violence that the lady was soundly besplashed with mud from head to foot. It was after this ungallant incident, as I was informed, that the laird, General Sharpe, called at Hoddam Hill, and Carlyle went to him at the door, declining to ask him in. They had a battle

IN OLD ENGLAND

royal of words, and the general brought matters to a crisis by asking with a sneer, "You, what do *you* know about farming?" This thunder roused the Carlylean lightning. "One thing I can do," he shouted, "I can pay the rent! That's all you have to do with the land, and I'll feed laverocks on it if I like." Then he slammed the door in the irate general's face. Carlyle had often wanted a door of his own which he might "slam in the face of all nauseous intrusions;" he had got it now — and used it. But he was not to have it for long. No laird would endure such treatment from a tenant; at any rate, General Sharpe was not the man to endure it. And so Carlyle had to quit Hoddam Hill and look about for a new home.

During his year at Hoddam Hill, a year which abode as "a russet-coated idyl" in his memory because of the visit Miss Welsh paid him there, Carlyle had two objects in his landscape in which he took a deep interest; and they are of interest to us because his eyes rested upon them so often, and also because there are so many allusions to them in his letters. Chief of these was Repentance Tower, a solemn-looking building which stood near the house, but a little higher up on the hill. It is surrounded by a graveyard, and

LITERARY BY-PATHS

hangs there so spectral amid its memorials of the dead that it might furnish food for thought in sinners of a less reflecting turn of mind than Carlyle. The cause of its erection and the origin of its name are thus related: A certain Lord Herries — identified as the champion of Mary Queen of Scots — was famous among those who, three or four centuries ago, made forays into the English border. On one occasion, when returning with many prisoners, he was overtaken by a storm while crossing the Solway; and in order to lighten his boat, he cut all their throats and cast them into the sea. Some time after, feeling great qualms of conscience, he built this sturdy tower, carving over the door the figures of a dove and serpent, emblems of remorse and grace, with the word “Repentance” between them. The other prominent object in Carlyle’s landscape was Hoddam Kirk, a low-lying and rather picturesque building with a curious little tower. In that building hung the bell to which he makes a pathetic allusion in his reminiscences of life at Hoddam Hill. “My thoughts were peaceable, full of pity and humanity as they had never been before. Nowhere can I recollect of myself such pious musings, communings silent and spontaneous with fact and nature, as in those poor An-

IN OLD ENGLAND

nandale localities. The sound of the Kirk-bell once or twice on Sunday mornings (from Hoddam Kirk, about a mile on the plains below me) was strangely touching, like the departing voice of eighteen hundred years."

The abrupt termination of Carlyle's tenancy of Hoddam Hill coincided with the expiration of his father's lease of Mainhill; and there had to be a double flitting. Once more there was diligent searching through the countryside for a desirable farm — rewarded



SCOTSBRIG

at length by the discovery of Scotsbrig, which was to remain the family home for the rest of Carlyle's life. Scotsbrig is so closely interwoven with the history of his books that his word-pictures of the place, both in anticipation and realisation, deserve to be added to that provided by the camera. In anticipation he wrote to his brother John:—

“By dint of unbounded higgling, and the most consummate diplomacy, the point was achieved

LITERARY BY-PATHS

to complete satisfaction of the two husbandmen [Carlyle's father and Alick]; and Scotsbrig, free of various 'clogs and claims,' which they argued away, obtained for a rent of £190 (cheap as they reckon it), in the face of many competitors. . . . The people are also to repair the house effectually, to floor it anew, put *bun*-doors on it, new windows, and so forth; and it seems it is 'an excellent *shell* of a house already.' . . . Our mother declares that there 'is plenty of both *peats* and water;' others think 'the farm is the best in Middlebie parishin;' our father seems to have renewed his youth even as the eagle's age."

Two months later, Carlyle wrote to John again, this time in realisation: "We are all got over with whole bones to this new country; and every soul of us, our mother to begin with, much in love with it. The house is in bad order; but we hope to have it soon repaired; and for farming purposes it is an excellent 'shell of a house.' Then we have a *linn* with crags and bushes, and a 'fairy knowe,' though no fairies that I have seen yet; and, cries our mother, abundance of grand thready peats, and water from the brook, and no reek, and no Honor [that is, General

Sharpe] to pester us ! To say nothing, cries our father, of the eighteen *yeacre* of the best barley in the country ; and bog-hay adds Alick, to fatten scores of young beasts ! In fact, making allowance for new-fangledness, it is a *much* better place, so far as I can judge, than any our people have yet been in ; and among a far better and kindlier sort of people."

Such was Scotsbrig in 1826 ; and such it remains to the present day. Here Carlyle's father and mother lived for the remainder of their days ; and here his brother James kept the old home together until within a few years of his own death. Here, too, Carlyle spent the most of his holidays ; for even after he became famous, and could have passed those holidays in the homes of the greatest in the land, he generally elected to spend his days of rest among his own kindred, in this unpretentious but peaceful home. It is well known that Carlyle suffered severely in writing his books. Most authors do. No book that is worth writing is written without a great expenditure of nervous and mental force. George Eliot said of "*Romola*," that she began it a young woman, but finished it an old woman. It was so with Carlyle. When he had finished a book, he felt completely prostrate, and to recover

LITERARY BY-PATHS

strength and spirit again he generally fled to Scotsbrig. What Virgil did for Dante at the foot of Purgatory, Scotsbrig did for Carlyle when he emerged from the inferno into which his books plunged him ; the dews of homely affection washed away from his spirit those sombre hues which settled so thickly upon him as he wrestled with those grim thoughts of the underworld to which his genius led him.

Before visiting the Ecclefechan district, I was under the impression that Carlyle's country was bleak and bare. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Although Mainhill is the least attractive of his early homes, the surrounding scenery and the view from the farmhouse more than compensate for the lack of beauty in its immediate environments. Scotsbrig is as picturesque a retreat as the most impassioned lover of nature could desire ; and the road thither from Ecclefechan leads the pilgrim alluringly onward between luxurious hedgerows and flower-covered banks. Hoddam Hill, as we have seen, greatly pleased even Carlyle ; and there could be no more eloquent testimony in its favour. Set on the summit of a hill, amid richly wooded scenery, it commands a view of verdant country unrivalled in any part of the British Isles. First



THE "KIND BEECH ROWS OF ECCLEFECHAN"

the eye sweeps over a rich belt of land to the shores of the Solway, then, crossing its waters, rests upon the plains of Cumberland, and finally reaches the limit of vision among the mountains of Wordsworth's country.

The roads leading from Ecclefechan toward Hoddam Hill are even more beautiful than those which point the way to Scotsbrig. When, in "*Sartor Resartus*," Carlyle describes the feelings which took possession of his spirit as he entered Annan for the first time to attend school there, it seemed to him an added source of sorrow that the "kind beech rows of Entepfuhl [that is, Ecclefechan] were hidden in the distance." He had passed between those beech rows on that memorable Whitsuntide walk; and blinded indeed would the eyes be of a man or youth who could walk through such avenues with indifference. These scenes were not lost on Carlyle. Annandale has had its influence on his most characteristic book; for no man can appreciate the essential poetry of "*Sartor Resartus*" until he has visited the Ecclefechan district. There is an inexplicable charm about that countryside, which Carlyle has caught and perpetuated in his pages, a charm which is totally independent of the strain of thought running through the volume.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

As is too common in Scotland, a poor minimum of care seems to be bestowed upon the God's acre where Carlyle and his kindred lie quiet in death. Surrounded by a rude and bare stone wall, entered through an unlovely iron gate, the graves in general speak eloquently of the forgetfulness of human sorrow.

“Headstone and half-sunk footstone lean awry,
Wanting the brick-work promised by and by ;
How the minute gray lichens, plate o'er plate,
Have softened down the crisp-cut name and date !”

The Carlyle grave is an exception to this rule. Inside the high iron railing that surrounds it, perpetuating the Carlyle aloofness even in death, the grass is closely cut; and daisies are the only weeds allowed to grow there. There are three graves within the enclosure, Carlyle being buried in the centre. In the grave to the left sleep his father and mother, and two of his sisters; also his father's wife by his first marriage. The final sentence of the inscription was written by Carlyle.

“Erected to the
Memory of Jannet Carlyle,
Spouse to James Carlyle, mason
in Ecclefechan, who died
the 11th Septr 1792 in the 25th
year of her age.

IN OLD ENGLAND

Also Jannet Carlyle, daughter to
James Carlyle and Margaret Aitken.
She died at Ecclefechan Jan. 27th, 1801 ;
aged 17 months. Also Margaret
their daughter, she died June 22nd 1830
aged 27 years — And the above

James Carlyle, born at Brownknowe
in Augt. 1758, died at Scotsbrig on the
23rd Jany 1832, and now also rests here.

And here also now rests the above
Margaret Aitken, his second wife. Born at
Whitestanes, Kirkmahoe, in
Sept. 1771 ; died at Scotsbrig,
On Christmas day 1853. She brought
him nine children ; whereof four
sons and three daughters survived
gratefully reverent of such
a Father, and such a Mother."

Carlyle's reminiscences of his father and the reflections which he penned in his journal on his mother's death prove what a wealth of affection he bore toward his parents. Mr. Froude testifies : " The strongest personal passion which he experienced through all his life was his affection for his mother." " Mother," he said to her when he removed to London, " Mother, you shall see me once yearly, and regularly hear from me, while we live." He kept his promise ; and even when death claimed his mother for his own he never visited Ecclefechan without going to her grave. A native of the village told me that, going late one summer evening into the churchyard, he

LITERARY BY-PATHS

saw an aged man lying prostrate on Margaret Aitken's grave. It was Thomas Carlyle.

The grave to the right is that of Carlyle's brother James, of whom many characteristic and Carlylean stories were told me. To a certain extent he appears to have shared the old roadman's opinions of his famous brother's work, or at least to have been indifferent to immortal achievements in the realm of literature. He was met one day in the village by a party of American pilgrims, who, ignorant of his identity, asked of him the whereabouts of Carlyle's grave. "Which Carlyle?" "Oh, the great Carlyle, 'Thomas Carlyle.'" With unmoved face he gave the information asked, and was rewarded with a fine outburst of hero-worship. "We have come all the way from America," said the spokesman of the pilgrims, "to lay this wreath on our great teacher's grave." "Ha!" rejoined he, still unmoved, "it's a gey harmless occupation!" Again, at some meeting of the farmers in the district, the rent day probably, a dinner was given, and some long-winded yeoman said grace before the meal. Jamie listened through it patiently, then saluted his over-unctuous neighbour with the remark, "A vera guid blessing, Wullie, but ye've spoilt the soup."

IN OLD ENGLAND

No lies are told on Carlyle's tombstone. The inscription is simple and laconic. The family



CARLYLE'S GRAVE

crest, two wyverns, the family motto, *Humilitate*, and then these words : —

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“ Here rests Thomas Carlyle, who was born at Ecclefechan, 4th December, 1795, and died at 24 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London, on Saturday, 5th February, 1881.”

That is all ; and yet it is enough. There are two significant, pregnant words, *Humilitate*, *Rests*. To the student of Carlyle they will preach deeper meanings than a Johnsonian epitaph. Whether the result of choice or accident, there is a singular appropriateness in John Carlyle sharing the grave of his illustrious brother. They had common aims in life ; they will both live in literature, and in their death they are not divided.

In his reminiscences of his father, and in the rough notes he made of family history, Carlyle is at great pains to forestall any unfavourable criticism of his kindred. In such Annandale quarrels as the Carlyles mingled, they were not, he says, aggressive ; their contentions were only “ manful assertions of man’s rights against men that would infringe them.” But there is a difference between family history written subjectively and the same history written objectively. For example, when the Carlyles were at work upon some building they occasionally diverted themselves by splashing wet lime upon a hapless passer-by ; and if he threatened reprisals they coolly warned him that “ he needna

IN OLD ENGLAND

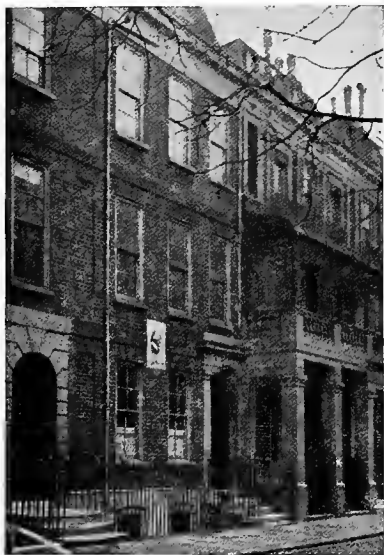
try, for it wasna ane o' them he would hae to fash, but the hail lot o' them!" Several such instances are authenticated, and the Carlyles are said to have paid special attentions of this sort to any pedestrian who had the misfortune to be better dressed than themselves. Mr. Froude, who was charitable, wrote me that he never heard this story, and that if true, there must be another side to it. "They were a proud race," he added, "too proud to go into paltry impertinences; but I can believe that in other ways they may have given endless offence."

There are many magnets which attract the literary pilgrim to Chelsea. In St. Luke's rectory Charles Kingsley spent several years of his boyhood; a cottage in Cheyne Walk witnessed the gloomy sunset of Turner's life; Upper Cheyne Row provided a home for a time for the thriftless household of Leigh Hunt; and two of the stately houses which front the river Thames are linked with the lives of Rossetti and George Eliot. But it is in no disparagement of these other immortals that the shrine which is first sought is No. 24 Cheyne Row.

Once Carlyle settled down in London he did not flit from house to house as so many other famous writers have done. Perhaps that was

LITERARY BY-PATHS

owing partly to the care he expended in searching for a suitable home. He travelled many miles on that search ; walked hither and thither until his feet were lamed under him. At length



CARLYLE'S LONDON HOME

his good fortune led him to Chelsea, and the house he chose there sheltered him for the rest of his days. "We lie safe at a bend of the river," he wrote to his anxious mother, "away from all the great roads, have air and quiet hardly inferior to Craigenputtoch, an outlook from the

back windows into mere leafy regions, with here and there a red high-peaked old roof looking through ; and see nothing of London, except by day the summits of St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, and by night the gleam of the great Babylon affronting the peaceful skies." When Carlyle took possession of the house in

IN OLD ENGLAND

Cheyne Row it consisted of three floors and a half-sunk basement, and the rent he paid was but £35! Some years ago it was announced as "To Let," and whoso inquired the rent found that the figure had risen to £90. But now not even £90 a year could secure it, for the building has properly passed into the possession of the Nation, and will be carefully preserved to receive the homage of generations yet unborn. It is full of Carlyle relics, but to the seeing eye it is even more peopled with the shades of those sons and daughters of fame who have gathered within its walls.

Here, as in Scotland, where no adequate memorial of Carlyle is to be found, the wise disciple of such a teacher comforts himself with these words: "For giving his soul to the common cause, he has won for himself a wreath which will not fade and a tomb the most honorable, not where his dust is decaying, but where his glory lives in everlasting remembrance. For of illustrious men all the earth is the sepulchre, and it is not the inscribed column in their own land which is the record of their virtues, but the unwritten memory of them in the hearts and minds of all mankind."

X

**THOMAS HOOD'S
HOMES AND FRIENDS**

X

THOMAS HOOD'S HOMES AND FRIENDS

*“ Jealous, I own it, I was once —
That wickedness I here renounce.
I tried at wit — it would not do ;
At tenderness — that failed me too.
Before me on each path there stood
The witty and the tender Hood ! ”*

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

HUMOUR and Pathos linked their hands across the cradle of Thomas Hood to vow him for their own. And he was theirs till death. Over the events of his life, or the creations of his brain, that joint possession never slackened its hold for an hour. If, to visible seeming, Pathos holds supremacy to-day in the suffering of the poet's body, Humour claims the guidance of his muse ; if to-morrow Humour should irradiate his outward life with laughter, we may be sure that Pathos will cast its shadow within. Tears and laughter are never far apart in that strangely mingled life. Behind the smile there is a thinly veiled sadness ; through the tears there comes a gleam of mirth.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

It was a dual life he lived, an April day of shine and shadow.

Hood once paid a visit to Ham House, which nestles so picturesquely among stately elms at the foot of Richmond Hill, and within a stone's throw of the "silver streaming Thames." It was summer-time, and the historic mansion and its famous avenue looked their best. But that visit was responsible for the creation of "The Elm-Tree." Hood saw nothing of the bright sunshine,



ELM-TREE AVENUE, HAM HOUSE

heard nothing of the songs of birds, or rather, he saw and heard them, and saw and heard beyond them. As he wandered down those avenues of loftly elms he caught no bird melody, but a "sad and solemn sound" filled his ears, which seemed now to murmur amid the leaves over his head,

IN OLD ENGLAND

and anon to rise from the greensward beneath his feet. It was not the wind sighing amid the branches, nor the squirrel rustling the leaves in its happy gambols from bough to bough, nor any Dryad making the forest voluble as in the olden time : —

“ But still the sound was in my ear,
A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmured overhead,
And sometimes underground.”

As the poet heard not the birds so he saw not the sunshine, but in the stead of golden shafts of light in that shady avenue, his eyes caught a glimpse of the Spectre of Death, standing by a sturdy elm fresh felled by the woodman's axe. And he heard death speak, and he knew then the cause of the mysterious murmur : —

“ This massy trunk that lies along,
And many more must fall —
For the very knave
Who digs the grave,
The man who spreads the pall,
And he who tolls the funeral bell,
The Elm shall have them all ! ”

Where other eyes had seen an elm tree, verdant with vigorous life, the haven of birds, the playground of squirrels, Hood had seen — a coffin !

LITERARY BY-PATHS

Has any other poet so pierced through the smiling mask of nature to the symbol of human sadness hidden behind?

Again, when life was nearing its close and his body was wasted with disease and racked with pain, the poet paused from his work one day to write letters to the three children of his devoted physician, Dr. Elliot, who were spending a holiday by the sea. There are no more delightful letters to children in English literature. Hood knew the measure of the child-mind to a fraction, and had full command of the reasoned nonsense which Lewis Carroll has made so popular since. But mingling with the boisterous fun of these delightful letters there are gentle sighs of sadness, all too gentle, one is happy to think, to have been detected by the bright young spirits to whom the letters were addressed. What child could catch the undercurrent of pathos in such sentences as these :—

“I wish there were such nice green hills here as there are at Sandgate. They must be very nice to roll down, especially if there are no furze-bushes to prickle one, at the bottom! Do you remember how the thorns stuck in us like a penn’orth of mixed pins, at Wanstead? I have been very ill,

IN OLD ENGLAND

and am so thin now I could stick myself into a prick. My legs, in particular, are so wasted away that somebody says my pins are only needles ; and I am so weak I dare say you could push me down on the floor and right through the carpet, unless it was a strong pattern. I am sure if I were at Sandgate you could carry me to the post-office and fetch my letters. . . .

“There are no flowers, I suppose, on the beach, or I would ask you to bring me a bouquet, as you used at Stratford. But there are little crabs ! If you would catch one for me, and teach it to dance the Polka, it would make me quite happy ; for I have not had any toys or playthings for a long time.”

Humour and Pathos, too, mingle themselves in one of the latest sketches Hood drew for his own magazine. Prevented by a severe illness from keeping faith with his readers, he ventured to express his regrets by the pencil instead of the pen, and in his sick-bed drawing the title of his magazine is symbolised by a magpie wearing a hood, while the “Editor’s Apologies” comprise a significant group of medicine bottles, a dish of leeches, and the picture of a heart with a line encircling it — typical of the enlarged heart from

LITERARY BY-PATHS

which he was dying. Thus, to the end, Hood was faithful to his own creed : —

“There is no music in the life
That sounds with idiot laughter solely ;
There’s not a string attuned to mirth,
But has its chord in melancholy.”

On the poet’s monument, in Kensal Green Cemetery, the date of his birth is given as 23d May, 1798, but in several biographies that event is stated to have taken place a year later. His own children appear to have been doubtful on this point, for his daughter, in her “Memorials,” gives the later year on no surer authority than “as far as we trace.” Henceforth, however, the exact date of Hood’s birth need be no longer a matter of uncertainty, for here is a verbatim copy of his natal certificate : —

“These are to certify, that Thomas Hood, son of Thomas Hood and Elizabeth Hood his wife, who was Daughter of James Sands, was Born in the Poultry, in the parish of St. Mildred, in the City of London, the Twenty-third Day of May, in the Year One thousand Seven hundred and Ninety-nine, at whose Birth we were present.

“RUTH SANDS.

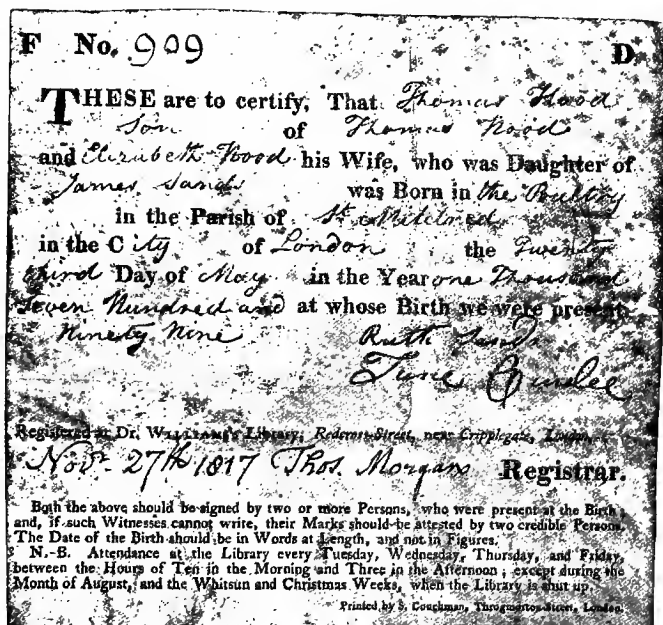
“JANE CURLEE.

IN OLD ENGLAND

“Registered at Dr. William’s Library, Redcross-street, near Cripplegate, London.

“THOMAS MORGAN, Registrar.

“Nov. 27th, 1817.”



The original of this interesting document was in the possession of the late Mr. Towneley Green, R. I., whose mother was a sister of Thomas Hood's wife. It is to the same eminent artist's kindness that I am indebted for permission to use those extracts from some unpublished letters

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of Hood, which will be found below. What other valuable services Mr. Towneley Green rendered me in the preparation of these pages will make themselves manifest from time to time. To return to the birth certificate for a moment. It will be seen that this document makes known, for the first time, the Christian name of Hood's maternal grandfather (hitherto his mother has been spoken of as the "sister of Mr. Robert Sands"); that it definitely locates the Poultry as the place of his birth; that one of his aunts was present at his entrance to the world; and finally, that the registration was effected more than eighteen years after the birth took place. With regard to the second fact, it is interesting to know that the building now known as No. 31, Poultry, stands upon the same site as that in which the poet was born over a century ago. It is, of course, impossible to explain the protracted delay in the registration of the birth, or why, after eighteen years, it should have been registered at all. But a guess may be hazarded. Hood was apprenticed to his uncle, Robert Sands, the engraver, and it may be that the registration of his birth is connected with that event.

Thomas Hood attained his majority without achieving any definite connection with literature,

but his son ought not to have lent his authority to the assertion that prior to 1821 his father "had displayed no strong literary tendencies." During his visit to Dundee, in search of health, which lasted, there are sound reasons for believing, from December, 1814, to some time in 1817, he had written a large quantity of verse, and his connection on his return to London, with the "private select Literary Society," of the "Reminiscences," kept him busy with his pen. In short, Hood did not enter the world of letters until after he had served a long apprenticeship to the pen. This is made clear by a letter (unknown to his daughter when she compiled the "Memorials") he wrote in 1820 to a Scottish correspondent, who had written to offer profuse apologies for having lost the manuscript of Hood's rhymed "Dundee Guide."

"I will tell you a secret for your comfort, that the loss, if even great, would not be irreparable, for I could, if necessary, write afresh from memory and nearly verbatim. It is the same with nearly all the rest of my effusions, some of which I shall hereafter send for your perusal, to show you that I do not consider you the 'careless friend' you represent yourself to be. I continue to receive

LITERARY BY-PATHS

much pleasure from our literary society, and from my own pursuits in that way, in which, considering my little time, I am very industrious ; that is to say, I spoil a deal of paper. My last is a mock heroic love-tale of 600 lines, with notes critical and explanatory, which I lately finished after many intervals, independent of two poetical addresses to the society on closing and opening a fresh session, with various pieces, chiefly amatory. . . .

“ I find I shall not be able to send my poems to you for some time, as they are in the hands of an intelligent bookseller, a friend of mine, who wishes to look them over. He says that they are worth publishing, but I doubt very much if he would give me any proof of his opinion, or I should indulge in the hope of sending them to you in a more durable shape.”

These passages prove, beyond question, that when, on the tragic death of John Scott, in 1821, the “London Magazine” became the property of Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, and those gentlemen enlisted the services of Thomas Hood as sub-editor of its pages, the young engraver was amply qualified to throw aside his etching-tools in favour of the pen. At first his duties appear

to have been little more than those of a superior proof-reader, but ere long he began inventing facetious "Answers to Correspondents," and in a short time he took an established place among the contributors to the magazine. It was a famous circle into which he thus gained admittance, and in Taylor's dining-room, at 93, Fleet Street, with its windows overlooking St. Bride's Churchyard, Hood often shared in such merriment as could only have been created in gatherings which included such spirits as Elia, Allan Cunningham, Barry Cornwall, Horace Smith, John Clare, and John Hamilton Reynolds. With two of that illustrious band, Hood was destined to enjoy an affectionate history. The gentle Elia quickly appealed to his heart, and the depth of his feeling for him may be inferred from the fact that of the two portraits which accompanied Hood in all his wanderings and changes, one was that of Charles Lamb. The other member of the "London Magazine" circle to enter into close companionship with Hood was John Hamilton Reynolds. It was no doubt profitable for Hood to enter into such relationship with Reynolds, apart from the fact that the friendship culminated in his marriage with his sister, Jane Reynolds. Keats himself was often indebted to the fine lit-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

erary instinct of John Hamilton Reynolds, and it is highly probable that Hood also reaped material advantage in the same direction. Keats and Reynolds contemplated collaboration in a volume of poems; Hood and Reynolds carried such a scheme to fruition. Hence the volume of "Odes and Addresses to Great People," which Coleridge so confidently attributed to Lamb, and of which, while still in the making, Hood wrote to Reynolds: "I think the thing is likely to be a hit, but if you do some I shall expect it to run like wild-fire."

Unhappily, this promising friendship did not survive till that final severance which ends all friendships. The two quarrelled, but why they quarrelled will never be known. Neither of the children of Hood nor his other close relatives knew how the estrangement came about. Nor is it known when the rupture took place; all that is certain is that it was subsequent to Hood's marriage with Jane Reynolds, and also subsequent to John Hamilton Reynolds's own marriage with Miss Drew. That the latter was the case is proved by a document in Hood's writing among the unpublished papers of Mr. Towneley Green. This is a humorous account of Reynolds's wedding, drawn up in the form of a State procession,

IN OLD ENGLAND

and it provides another illustration of the lively spirit with which Hood was wont to celebrate all important family occasions. Here it is :

A Progress from London to Wedlock through Exeter

PEOPLE OF EXETER WITH BANNERS

GLOVERS

HONOURABLE COMPANY OF MATCH MAKERS

BANNER

BEADLE WITH HIS BANNER

HYMEN AND AMEN WITH THEIR BANNEBS

1ST, 2ND, AND 3RD TIMES OF ASKING WITH THEIR AXES

PAGE BEARING THE MATRIMONIAL YOKE WITH THE MILK OF HUMAN
KINDNESS

THE HAPPY PAIR!

BANNERS, MUTUAL BENEFIT, HAND-IN-HAND, AND UNION, WITH THE
SWEET LITTLE CHERUB THAT SITS UP ALOFT

DOMESTIC HABITS IN LIVERY, ATTENDED BY DOMESTIC COMFORT

BANNER

CARMEN NUPTIALE

CUPID WITH THE RING

EDITOR WITH HIS STAFF

MESSRS. TAYLOR AND HESSEY, ALLAN CUNNINGHAM, RICHARD WOOD-
HOUSE, THEODOBE, W. HAZLITT, H. CARY, C. VINKBOOMS, JAMES
WEATHEBCK, THOS. DE QUINCEY, W. HILTON, C. LAMB AS DIDDLE
DIDDLE DUMPKINS WITH ONE SHOE OFF AND ONE SHOE ON, AND HIS
MAN, JOHN CLARE; J. RICE, W. PROCTOR, MR. RILEY-PARKER. THE

LAMB FLAGS CARRIED BY MR. MONTGOMERY

LION'S HEAD WITH HIS TWO PAGES

PLACARD "THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY"

MR. AND MRS. REYNOLDS AND MRS. BUTLER

TRAIN BEARERS

CUPIDS IN LIVERY

LITERARY BY-PATHS

BANNER: THE FAMILY CREST

THE THREE MISS REYNOLDS

TRAINBEARERS

BANNER: CUPID WITH A WHITE BOW

THREE GENTLEMEN AFTER THE THREE MISS REYNOLDS

PLACARD: "THE BRIDE'S CHARACTER"

FRIENDS: MUSICIANS: A BLIND BARD, HARPING ON ONE STRING
WIND INSTRUMENTS, "PIPING TO THE SPIRIT DITTIES OF NO TONE,"

ETC., ETC.

BANNER

THE PEOPLE OF EXETER

It was, of course, in the family home of his friend Reynolds that Hood met his future wife, Jane Reynolds. The family lived in Little Britain in one of the "Master's houses," as those buildings were called which were devoted to the use of the tutors of Christ's Hospital near by. The father was Writing and Mathematical Master in that famous school, and he and his wife and children were evidently friends and abettors of all those who found their chief pleasure in literature; Keats and Lamb were frequent visitors, and many lesser lights in the early nineteenth-century world of letters were often found under that congenial roof in Little Britain. Mrs. Reynolds herself was possessed of fine literary instincts, and in 1827 she published, under the pen-name of "Mrs. Hamerton" a delightful little tale bearing the title of "Mrs. Leslie and

IN OLD ENGLAND

her Grandchildren." A copy of this rare volume was in the library of Mr. Towneley Green, and on its half-title page there is pasted a brief extract of a letter from Lamb to Hood. The extract reads thus :—

“DEAR H. — Emma has a favour, besides a bed, to ask of Mrs. Hood. Your parcel was gratifying. We have all been pleased with Mrs. Leslie: I speak it most sincerely. There is much manly sense with a feminine expression, which is my definition of ladies' writing.”

Hood's wooing of Jane Reynolds appears to have met with some opposition from within the Little Britain family circle, but the young poet evidently had a zealous advocate in the person of his betrothed's mother. The following hitherto unpublished letter from Hood to Mrs. Reynolds witnesses to a warm spirit of affection between the two. The date of the letter is uncertain.

“LOWER STREET

“ISLINGTON.

“MY DEAREST MOTHER, — I was to have written to you yesterday evening, but my hand was so tired with transcribing all the morning that

LITERARY BY-PATHS

I was obliged unwillingly to let it rest. I do not know how I am to put *interest* enough in these lines to repay you for the long time I have been indebted for your kind ones ; I know they were written designedly to put me in heart and hope, and indeed they were more than a pleasure to me in the midst of pain. They were not only kind, but enlivened with such smart and humorous conceits as might account for some part of my difficulty in finding a reply. You know I am not used to flatter ; and if I were to begin now, Heaven help me, but you should be the last woman for my experiment. I know you have a ‘smashing blow’ for such butter-moulds.

“I am a great deal better. My hands are now returned to their natural size. From their plumpness before with the little nourishment I took, and their afterwards falling away, you would have thought I sustained myself like the bears, by sucking my paws. I am now on a stouter diet, a Beef-eater, and devour my ox by instalments ; so provide yourself against I come. I have nursed a hope of seeing you on Sunday. It has been one of the greatest privations of my illness to be debarred from a presence so kind as yours ; but I trust, weak as I am, to make my bow at your next drawing-room. You know

there is a hope for everything ; your old rose-tree has a bud on it.

“I wish you could patronise my garden, you should walk about it like Aurora, and bedew the young plants. It is quite green, and the flowers that were sown, are now *seed* coming up from the ground. I am just going there as soon as I have achieved this letter. The fresh air feeds me like a chameleon, and makes me change the colour of my skin too. I shall need all my strength if you expect me to come and romp with your grandchild. My dear Jane writes that owing to Mr. Acland's delay, it is likely that they may not come up till the week after next. Pray make use of the interval in double-bracing your nerves against the tumults of ‘the little sensible Longmore.’ She will put you to your Hop-Tea. I expect she will quite revolutionise Little Britain. The awful brow of Mariane, the muscular powers of Lottie, the serious remonstrances of Aunt Jane, the maternal and grand-maternal authorities will be set at nought with impunity. As for Green and I, we shall come up empty about dinner-time, and in the hubbub, be sent empty away. The old china will be cracked like mad ; the tour-terelles, finger-blotted and spoiled ; the chintz, — now *couleur*

LITERARY BY-PATHS

de rose — all rumpled and unflounced ! You will get some rest never !

“ I had a note from that unfortunate youth Haley, on Sunday. It commenced : ‘ Saturated with rain,’ as if to show me the use he had made of my dictionary ; and ended by begging a trifle to help him into the 99th. I played the sergeant’s part and gave him a shilling, not from any bounty of my own, but because all the girls cried out upon me for their parts. ‘ They could not resist such entreaties.’ However, do not blame me, for I mean to cut him off with it, and be deaf to his letters in the future.

“ I have been obliged to avail myself of the sunshine, and wish I could send you some by this letter, to sit in your thoughts. I hope you dwell only on the pleasant ones ; for, with all your cares, you must have many such. Think of your good and clever daughters, who paint sea nymphs, and sing, and play on the piano ; and of your son John, dear to the Muses. I think few families have been dealt with so well, if, indeed, any. There’s Jane, and Eliza, Mariane, and Lottie, — four Queens ; and John, — you must count ‘ two for his nob.’ I was glad to hear that he came to you, and in such excellent tune and highly pleased with his praise of

my Poem. It was worth the commendations of all a 'London Magazine' to me; with its Editor at the head, or, if you please, at the tail. Pray tell Mariane that I have written a long, serious, Spanish story, trying not to be more idle than I can help, which, as soon as it is transcribed, I shall send to her. I have almost written some songs for Lottie, but want rhymes to them. I have never been allowed yet to sigh to your 'Willow Song' for the Album. Lambkins and Willows were indispensable to the old songs, but I thought such *fleecy-osiery* poetry went out with Pope. I almost think it a shame amongst all my rhyming that I have never yet mused upon you; but please God, you and I mend, you shall adorn a sonnet yet, and if it be worthy of you, I shall think myself some 'Boet,' as Handel used to call it. I might have a much worse subject and inspiration than the recollection of your goodness, and with that happy remembrance I will leave off. God bless you, my dearest Mother! You say you wonder how it is I respect and esteem you as such, as if I had not read in you a kindness towards me, which in such a heart as yours must always outrun its means; nay, as if in thinking me worthy of one of your excellent daughters, you have not in all the love and duty

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of a son made me bounden to you for ever. Perhaps after this you will bear with my earnest looks in knowing that they are attracted to you by a gratitude and affection which could never enough thank and bless you, if they did not do so sometimes silently and in secret.

“Pray distribute my kindest love amongst all, and believe it my greatest happiness to join with your own in all duty, honour, and affection as your son.

“T. HOOD.”

It will be evident from the above letter that by the time it was written, Hood had become perfectly at home in the house at Little Britain. Indeed, his relations with all the members of the family were of a characteristically affectionate nature. As may be inferred from the letter just quoted, one of the sisters, Eliza, was already married to Mr. Longmore; Jane was married to Hood; Mariane was to wed the Mr. Green who was to share Hood's mealless fate through the “hubbub” over the advent of the Longmore grandchild; and Charlotte, the subject of Hood's “Number One,” was fated to die single. If the poet had a favourite among his three sisters-in-law, Mariane was undoubtedly she. One of his

IN OLD ENGLAND

letters to her will make that predilection abundantly clear. It should be premised that when it was written Mariane Reynolds was on a visit to her sister, Mrs. Longmore, at Chelmsford, Essex.

“LOWER STREET, ISLINGTON.

“MY VERY DEAR MARIANE, — Such kind messages as yours are irresistible, and I must write again if only to show you that I feel more than repaid for my last letter. I know that you do not like to correspond yourself, but it shall be enough for me, dear, if I may believe that I am not quite the last person you would write to. Indeed I know that I should not, if I could, imagine how very much I am pleased with whatever you say or do ; which is far too much to let me become the graceless and ungrateful critic. But I know that you do not wrong me by any such fear, and, therefore, till you write to others, and not to me, I shall consider that my letters are answered by the pleasure they may give you. I am sure they are not without delight to myself, and still more when I learn that you are to keep them ; for I know whatever kindnesses they may contain, that they will never be belied by time. I might even crowd them with more affection, and still be justified, for I

LITERARY BY-PATHS

have a thousand reasons for loving you, if you were not my dear Jane's sister, which is a thousand reasons in one. But I can afford to waive that for your own sake, tho' when I remember that I might have had a Drew instead, I cannot feel too happy, too proud, or too fond of you in that relation. I wish I could but give you a tenth part of such causes to make me dear to you; however it is some merit to love you, and you must give me the benefit of that consideration. Therefore, dear, do store up these letters, and if, hereafter, you should lack a true wight to do you suit or service, let them remind you of the hand and heart of a Brother. Would he were as potent, as proud of this title, for yours and others' dear sake; but it is not the fault of my wish that I cannot make you Queen of the Amaranths, or pluck a bow of green leaves and turn them into emeralds for your casket.

“There is a tale of a little prince who had a ruby heart, and whatever he wished on it was instantly granted; but it is not so with mine. Neither have I Aladdin's Lamp, or it should have been scrubbed bright ere the Chelmsford Ball. But now it is a dark Lanthorn, and the glory of fairyland is bedimmed for ever. Only the fiery dragons remain, which be cares many

and fearful ; and the black cats, and the demons and imps and the ogres, who are the Booksellers, except that they have no eye in their foreheads. But I am not writing King Obern's Elegy ; so away with this lament for the little people, and let's think of the living !

“The interesting little Miss Kindred has enquired after you, and you have been missed at Le Mercier's. We met the former at Mr. Butler's last night, and she seemed what the world would call a sweet girl, full of sensibility and commerce. Her sister, I should think, has a smack of Prudence Morton. I like her best, for she was absent. Jane has made a very pleasant addition to her friendships, by her introduction at another party (Le Mercier's) to a Mrs. Simpson and a Mrs. Cockle. I quite wish you had the former at Chelmsford. There was a Mr. Capper, too, with a facsimile of Woodhouse's profile, as if such a one was worthy of two editions ; and I wish you could have seen him too. You should have him in for nothing, in exchange, with all the others, against Green, when it shall please you to export him. The ladies of Chelmsford might grow their own. They have had time enough to shred him like Angelica. No doubt he hath often gone, pur-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

posely, to the coach, when it was too late, like dear Miss Longmore,

“ ‘Farewell so often goes before ’t is gone !’

He has been so long expected here that we are afraid he is coming by a hearse. Tell him, the house of Blackheath has been robbed, and his little nephews Wielanded. Only think that Butler likes ‘St. Ronan’s Well,’ and does not dote on old Im—no, ‘Old Mortality’ ! Have you any bluestockings at Chelmsford ? Tell them that you know a gentleman that knows a friend of Barry Cornwall. We are plotting here to go to the play when it shall be worth seeing, but do not let that hasten you. If you stay a week longer you shall have another letter, and a better. Now, I am rather hurried, and must put in an appearance before Mr. Hessey. So God bless you, dear, tho’, I say that deliberately, accept my sincere love and kind wishes, and believe me, for ever,

“ Your affectionate Brother,

“ T. HOOD.

“ P. S. for MISS LONGMORE, — London is very dull and foggy, and the baked codlins very dear. Pray wear list shoes this nasty, slidy weather,

IN OLD ENGLAND

and keep your feet warm ; there's nothing like that. I have got a sprained ankle, but do not let that grieve you. Some people like a well-turn'd one, but I don't. It gives me a great deal of pain, but I must say good-bye, good-bye, good-bye, go — goo — good, by — by — bye."

Notwithstanding the opposition to his suit, Hood, in due time, reaped the reward of his sincere affection for Jane Reynolds. There were dark days in store for these two, days of unceasing buffeting with adverse fortune, made all the more trying by persistent ill health, but their devotion and affection never faltered for a single moment. Through good report and ill, Jane Hood was a true and faithful wife, the inspiration of some of her husband's best work, and his ever-ready helper in preparing his manuscripts for the printers. On his part, too, Thomas Hood never failed in love and duty towards his wife ; "he was an ideal husband," testifies Mr. Towneley Green, "and wholly devoted to Mrs. Hood." The honeymoon was spent at Hastings, and from thence there came to Mariane and Charlotte Reynolds a letter as rich in the peculiar qualities of Hood's genius as any production of his pen.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

“THE PRIORY, HASTINGS,
“Tuesday morning.

“MY DEAR MARIANE: MY DEAR LOT, — I shall leave Jane to explain to you why we have not written sooner, and betake myself at once to fill up my share of the letter; Jane meanwhile resting her two sprained ankles, worn out with walking, or rolling rather, upon the pebbly beach; for she is not, as she says, the shingle woman that she used to be. This morning I took her up to the castle, and it would have amused you, after I had hauled her up, with great labour, one of its giddy steps, to see her contemplating her re-descent. Behind her, an unkindly wall, in which there was no door to admit us from the level ridge to which we had attained; before her, nothing but the inevitable steep. At the first glance downwards she seemed to comprehend that she must stay there all the day, and, as I generally do, I thought with her. We are neither of us a chamois, but after a good deal of joint scuffling and scrambling and kicking, I got her down again upon the *Downs*. I am almost afraid to tell you that we wished for our dear Mariane to share with us in the prospect from above. I had the pleasure besides of groping with her up a little corkscrew staircase

in a ruined turret, and seeing her poke her head like a sweep out at the top. The place was so small, methought it was like exploring a marrow bone.

“ This is the last of our excursions. We have tried, but in vain, to find out the baker and his wife recommended to us by Lamb as the very lions of green Hastings. There is no such street as he has named throughout the town, and the ovens are singularly numerous. We have given up the search, therefore, but we have discovered the little church in the wood, and it is such a church! It ought to have been our St. Botolph’s. (Pray tell Ma by the way, that we read our marriage in the morning papers at the library, and it read very well.) Such a verdant covert wood Stothard might paint for the haunting of Dioneus, Pamphillus, and Flammetta as they walk in the novel of Boccacce. The ground shadowed with bluebells, even to the formation of a plum-like bloom upon its little knolls and ridges ; and ever through the dell windeth a little path chequered with the shades of aspens and ashes and the most verdant and lively of all the family of trees. Here a broad, rude stone step-peth over a lazy spring, oozing its way into grass and weeds ; anon a fresh pathway divergeth, you

LITERARY BY-PATHS

know not whither. Meanwhile the wild blackbird startles across the way and singeth anew in some other shade. To have seen Flammetta there, stepping in silk attire, like a flower, and the sunlight looking upon her betwixt the branches! I had not walked (in the body) with romance before. Then suppose so much of a space cleared as maketh a small church *lawn* to be sprinkled with old gravestones, and in the midst the church itself, a small Christian dovecot, such as Lamb has truly described it, like a little temple of Juan Fernandez. I could have been sentimental and wished to lie some day in that place, its calm tenants seeming to come through such quiet ways, through those verdant alleys, to their graves.

“In coming home I killed a viper in our serpentine path, and Mrs. Fernor says I am by that token to overcome an enemy. Is Taylor or Hessey dead? The reptile was dark and dull, his blood being yet sluggish from the cold; howbeit, he tried to bite, till I cut him in two with a stone. I thought of Hessey’s long backbone when I did it.

“They are called *adders*, tell your father, because two and two of them together make four.

.

“ I resume. Like people with only one heart, we are writing with a single pen. Mrs. Fernor does not *let* more with her apartments, and we are obliged to ride and tie on the stump of an old goose-quill. In a struggle for possession we have inflicted the blots above. ‘ Some natural drops he shed, but *wiped* them soon,’ as Milton says. Our fire is beginning to burn on one side, a sign of a parting, and Mrs. Fernor is already grieving over our departure. On Thursday night we shall be at Islington and then I shall rejoice to see you as well as we are. I hope you have been comfortable, dear, and accustomed my house to the command which it is to comply with. I hope Green hath been often on Islington *Green*, which loveth you ; you will have learned from our topography to approach the *Angel*. I hope Ma hath hanselled our teacups. I hope my garden is transplanted into Mr. Oldenhaws’. I hope Dash is well and behaves well. But shortly I shall have an answer to all my anticipations. Now we must leave Hastings, the pleasant scene of our setting half-honeymoon. Oh, Lot, could’st thou but see the teacups at Mr. Davis’s ! Thou would’st shed some drops at quitting the place ! Pots, there is enamel, there is quaintness and richness of pattern ! Not tea merely, but kettles

LITERARY BY-PATHS

with gilded handles, gorgeous coffee-pots, transcending even thy own shelf. In one thing thou wert selfish, in not giving us that brown teapot. Nay, thou art worse than Mr. Davis, for his are to be got for money, if not for love.

“To-morrow we go to Lovers’ Seat, as it is called, to hallow it by our presence. Oh, how I wish we had you upon Lovers’ Seat, which took its name from the appointments of a fair maiden with a gallant lieutenant! He was in the preventive service, but his love was contraband, and in a romantic bay they used to elude the parental excise. Good-bye. God bless you, my dears, till we meet again. I long to meet you again as your Brother, most proud and happy in your affection. My love and duty to our good Mother and to our Father.

“Your own affectionate friend and Brother,

“T. HOOD.”

It would appear from the above letter that the young couple began housekeeping in the Islington district, but ere long they removed to Robert Street, Adelphi. During the twenty years of their married life, the Hoods had no fewer than eleven homes, but in the first three they seemed to have dwelt for rather longer than



ROBERT STREET, ADELPHI

IN OLD ENGLAND

the average of two years suggested by comparing both totals. The house they resided in at Robert Street, from about 1825 to 1829, was No. 2— a fact now, for the first time, established by Mr. Towneley Green's papers—and, save that the building has lost its numerical identity by absorption into the hotel which occupies the whole of the left-hand side of the street, this early home of the poet has changed but little during the past seventy years. Here their first child was born, and, breathing its last almost with its first cry, here arrived those tender lines of Lamb, "On an Infant Dying as soon as Born." While still dwelling in Robert Street, Hood edited one of those *Annals* so popular in England seventy or eighty years ago, the title being "The Gem," and the date of publication 1829. He was an industrious editor, casting his net far and wide. A letter from the Quaker poet, Bernard Barton, in answer to a request for a contribution from his pen, has so many points of interest that it deserves quotation in connection with this phase of Hood's literary enterprise.

"WOODBRIDGE,

April 26th, 1828.

"MY DEAR FRIEND, — I had almost, not sworn, for we friendly folk use not such attes-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

tations, I had well-nigh affirmed I would have nothing more to do with Annuals, saving that of my old friend Ackerman, which I write for from mere habit; but an application for an article to one conducted by thee and contributed by Elia will go far to induce me to try what I can do. Pray let me know, as early as may be, what is the latest I can be allowed.

“If anybody can make ought of such a speculation I know no one whose chances of success are better than thine; but I doubt the day is somewhat gone by. The thing was overdone, I fear, last year; and I hear of new ones starting. I had a letter a day or two ago from one of the joint authors of ‘Body and Soul,’ stating that he was about editing a new one. Whether it was the Body-man, or the Soul-man who addressed me, I know not! If only the former there are hopes for thee; if the latter, thou must prepare for a rivalry for Spirits. But I never read their joint Production, so perhaps there may be little difference betwixt them.

“What is thy Annual to be called, and who is to publish it? ‘These little things are great to little men,’ and to little books too. I am glad the old sentimental Title is to be abandoned. The ‘Pledge of Friendship’ must have been hit

on, I opine, by some enamoured swain, or sighing Nymph ; it is an unmeaning designation, for anything, everything, or nothing may be a pledge of what passes by courtesy for Friendship. How to supply its place, however, by anything appropriate and new, is beyond my powers of suggestion ; the change cannot well be for the worse, that's one comfort.

“Hast thou seen or heard ought of Elia lately ? I had a few lines from him a day or two back, written in worse spirits than I ever knew him exemplify. He said he was ill, too ; pray let me know he is better, for I should be loth to think him so bad as that notelet indicated.

“In conclusion, may I hope for the indulgent forgiveness of one cautionary hint, suggested by no meddling spirit of officious impertinence, but by a cordial desire for the success of the new undertaking, and a hearty interest in thy enduring fame. No one, I believe, ever undervalued wit who had the slightest capacity to appreciate its point and brilliancy ; I am well aware of the temptations to which so seductive a faculty is likely to expose its lively and mercurial possessor ; but ‘Hal ! and thou lovest me,’ pshaw ! that's nothing, — I mean, if thou hast a due regard to a still more lasting, pure, and enviable Name, do

LITERARY BY-PATHS

not in thy own contributions or in those accepted from others, suffer those merry quips and cranks to exclude totally more simple and sober articles. Heartily as I have laughed over many of thy lively sallies, several of these, despite their point and originality, I have forgotten ; but not a letter or line of the verses ‘I Remember, I Remember,’ have from the first perusal of them been long absent from my recollection. The touching simplicity and the deep pathos of those few witless verses electrified more at the moment by their perusal than the same quantum of poetry ever did before or since. I would rather be the author of those lines than of almost any modern volume of poetry published during the last ten years. This may seem extravagant, but I know it is written in no complimentary mood.

“Thine truly,

“B. BARTON.”

Tempting as it might be to show how far this letter bore fruit, and to dwell upon the literary activity of Hood in its various ramifications, it is necessary to turn once again to the more personal aspect of his life. How he celebrated one marriage in the Reynolds family has already been mentioned, and it now remains to dwell for a

IN OLD ENGLAND

moment on a characteristic water-colour sketch, with which he commemorated the wedding of his favourite, Mariane. The bridegroom was that Mr. Green who has figured frequently in



SKETCH BY HOOD TO CELEBRATE THE MARRIAGE OF
MARIANE REYNOLDS

the letters given above, and he is depicted in the guise of one of those "Jacks-of-the-Green," so ubiquitous on May Day in London a generation ago. As he takes his bride by the hand, the while the parson recites the words which make the two one, her face assumes a *greenish* hue. A gentleman in obtrusive goggles at the rear of the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

bridegroom is Mr. Green's brother, and the lady on his left, with a hook instead of a hand, is intended for Miss Charlotte Reynolds, the only member of the family to retain her single state. Behind her again is her sister Eliza, Mrs. Longmore, and on the extreme left of the sketch



ROSE COTTAGE, WINCHMORE HILL

stand Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds, senior. Nor did the perpetrator of this humorous wedding record spare himself, for Hood is to be observed in the right-hand corner, quaffing wine from a communion cup!

Notwithstanding that formidable hook, and, what was more to the purpose, a winning sweet-

IN OLD ENGLAND

ness of disposition, Charlotte Reynolds, as already indicated, remained faithful to the character Hood made her assume in his "Number One." She attained a ripe old age, dying in 1884, after having lived many years in the Hampstead home of



LAKE HOUSE, WANSTEAD

her two gifted nephews, the late Mr. Charles Green, R. I., and the late Mr. Towneley Green, R. I.

When the Hoods removed from Robert Street, some time in 1829, they found their next home in a picturesque cottage on Winchmore Hill. Probably some additions have been made to the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

rear of the building since that date, but otherwise it is unaltered, and with its roomy bay-windows, its creeper-clad walls, and its lovely garden, it remains to this day a picture of an ideal home for a poet. Hood's home instincts took deeper root at Winchmore Hill than anywhere else. "He was much attached to it," wrote his daughter, "and many years afterwards I have known him to point out some fancied resemblance in other places, and say to my mother, 'Jenny, that's very like Winchmore!'" In 1832 there came another removal, this time to Lake House, Wanstead. Here, again, there has been little change since the days of Hood's tenancy. Wedged in between the borders of Wanstead Park and that narrow tree-covered promontory of Epping Forest which reaches out as far south on the left, there may still be seen the picturesque few acres which constitute Lake House Park. The house, built almost wholly of wood, contains nine or ten bedrooms, a spacious kitchen, and a large dining-hall, which occupies almost the entire length of the building in the rear. In the garden behind the house are two old cherry-trees, and some years ago the larger of these was adorned with a copper plate bearing this inscription: "In pity for the woes of woman-

IN OLD ENGLAND

kind, beneath this ancient tree Thomas Hood wrote the ‘Song of the Shirt,’ — ‘Stitch, Stitch, Stitch.’” The tablet is gone, and the hope may be expressed that if the desire to replace it should ever have a practical issue, care will be



HOOD'S TREES AT WANSTEAD

taken not to perpetrate the falsehood of the old inscription ; for it was not here, and in 1832, that the “ Song of the Shirt ” was written, but in the Elm-tree Road, St. John’s Wood, in 1843.

Some family portrait-painting of abiding interest was achieved during the Lake House days, for it was here, in the opinion of Mr. Towneley

Green, that the portraits of Hood and his wife in the National Portrait Gallery were executed. Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds, senior, happened to be



MRS. HOOD, *née* JANE REYNOLDS

on a visit to Lake House at the time, and the latter was induced to sit for her portrait also. But no persuasion availed to lead Mr. Reynolds to face the same ordeal. Thus it happens that the only surviving record of his personal appearance is a time-stained pen-and-ink sketch. But

if his son-in-law could not persuade him to sit for his portrait he had little difficulty in inducing him to assume one day the character of a J. P. of the county. Several small boys had been caught in the act of plundering the cherry-tree above mentioned, and Hood could not resist the temptation of reading them a lesson by a mock trial. So the culprits were haled before the old



NO. 17, ELM-TREE ROAD, ST. JOHN'S WOOD

IN OLD ENGLAND

gentleman sitting in state in the dining-hall, and were duly sentenced to instant execution on the tree from which their thefts had been committed.

The poet's infant daughter had been previously coached to plead for mercy, and at her entreaties the sentence was as solemnly revoked as it had been pronounced.

From the early months of 1835 to the autumn of 1840, Hood was an exile, living first at Coblenz and afterwards at Ostend. It is not



THOMAS HOOD

necessary to dwell upon the sequence of monetary misfortunes which drove him to the Continent for the sake of cheap living, but those misfortunes ought never to be mentioned without the reminder being given that they were due to no fault on his side. When at last it became possible for him to return home, he resided

LITERARY BY-PATHS

for a brief season near Camberwell Green, removing to No. 17, Elm-tree Road, St. John's Wood, towards the end of 1841, on his being appointed editor of Colburn's "New Monthly Magazine" at a salary of £300 a year. In this house he resided until the Christmas of 1843, when he made his final flitting to Devonshire Lodge, New Finchley Road. That building, however — the scene of his death in 1845 — is no longer standing.

Hood's appointment as editor of the "New Monthly Magazine" was hailed with genuine satisfaction on all hands, and through the whole of 1842, and well on towards the end of the next year, he continued to discharge the duties of that position in such a manner as to fulfil all the favourable prophecies of his friends. Then there arose some misunderstanding between Mr. Colburn and his editor, in the midst of which the latter received the following letter from his staunch friend, Charles Dickens. It will assist in its interpretation if the reader bears in mind that when Hood received it he was on the eve of a visit to Scotland, undertaken partly for health's sake, but also in the hope that his journey might have a profitable issue in literary employment.

IN OLD ENGLAND

“BROADSTAIRS, KENT.

“Twelfth September, 1843.

“MY DEAR HOOD, — Since I received your first letter I have been pegging away tooth and nail at Chuzzlewit. Your supplementary note gave me a pang, such as one feels when a friend has to knock twice at the street door before anybody opens it.

“There can be no doubt in the mind of any honourable man, that the circumstances under which you signed your agreement are of the most disgraceful kind, in so far as Mr. Colburn is concerned. There can be no doubt that he took a money-lending, bill-broking, Jew-clothes-bagging, Saturday-night-pawnbroking advantage of your temporary situation. There is little doubt (so I learn from Forster, who had previously given me exactly your version of the circumstances) that, like most pieces of knavery, this precious document is a mere piece of folly, and just a scrap of wastepaper wherein Mr. Schobel might wrap his Chity-snuff. But I am sorry, speaking with a backward view to the feasibility of placing you in a better situation with Colburn, that you flung up the Editorship of the magazine. I think you did so at a bad time, and wasted your strength in consequence.

“When a thing is done it is of no use giving advice, not even when it can be as frankly rejected as mine can be by you. But have you *quite* determined to reject his offer of thirty guineas per sheet? Have you placed it, or resolved to place it, out of your power to enter into such an arrangement, if you should feel disposed to do so, by-and-bye? On my word, I would pause before I did so, and if I did, then most decidedly I would open a communication with Bentley, and try to get that magazine. For to any man, I don’t care who he is, the Editorship of a monthly magazine, on tolerable terms, is a matter of too much moment, in its pecuniary importance and certainty, to be flung away as of little worth. It would be to me, I assure you.

“I send you letters for Jeffrey and Napier. If the former should not be in Edinburgh, you will find him at his country place, Craigerook, within three or four miles of that city. Should you see Wilson, give him a hundred hearty greetings from me; and should you see the Blackwoods, don’t believe a word they say to you. Moir (their Delta) is a very fine fellow, and you will like him very much. In all probability he will come to see you, should he know

of your being in Edinburgh. A pleasant journey, and a pleasant return : Mrs. Dickens unites with me in best regards to Mrs. Hood, and I am always, my dear Hood.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ CHARLES DICKENS.

“ P. S. The light of Mr. Colburn’s countenance has not shone upon me in these parts. May I remain in outer darkness !”

Notwithstanding the advice of Dickens — perhaps it was too late — Hood’s rupture with Mr. Colburn was complete before the year ended, and January 1844, saw the first issue of his own venture, bearing the title of “ Hood’s Magazine.” He had suffered so much from publishers that he determined to issue the magazine himself, and an office for that purpose was secured at No. 1, Adam Street, Adelphi. Here he worked early and late at his editorial labours, and here he occasionally slept when the pressure of work was high. The magazine was a pronounced success from its first issue, and, had life and health been in store for Hood, there can be no question but it would have proved a valuable property. But the sixth issue of the monthly contained those

LITERARY BY-PATHS



NO. 1, ADAM STREET, ADELPHI

pathetic "Editor's Apologies" which have been already referred to, and although he rallied somewhat from the attack by which they were occasioned, henceforth there was little hope for



HOOD'S GRAVE IN KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

IN OLD ENGLAND

any material prolongation of life. With the issue of the magazine for March 1845, there was given an engraving of the bust of the Editor, and it was this portrait, specially printed on large plate paper, which Hood chose as his farewell gift to his friends. Between the attacks of pain, he sat up in bed to inscribe on each copy his signature and a few affectionate words, the number in the end reaching upwards of a hundred. These were to be his last messages to those who knew and loved him. He died on the 3rd May, 1845, and on a July day, nine years later, Monckton Milnes unveiled the monument which rests above his grave in Kensal Green Cemetery. Beneath the bust there runs the legend "He sang the Song of the Shirt," and on either side of the pedestal are bas-relief medallions of "Eugene Aram's Dream," and "The Bridge of Sighs" — all pertinent reminders of the fact that there was a serious as well as a humorous side to the genius of Hood.

He himself, there can be no doubt, would have elected to live by his serious verse, for when the public refused to purchase his "Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," did he not buy up the edition to "save it from the butter-shops"? If, even after death, there can be no dissolution

LITERARY BY-PATHS

of the dual domination of Humour and Pathos, at least let it be confessed that, in his graver moods, Thomas Hood achieved work which is not unworthy to be garnered with the choicest fruits of English poesy.



MEDALLION ON HOOD'S MONUMENT

XI

ROYAL WINCHESTER

XI

ROYAL WINCHESTER

- “ Behold a pupil of the monkish gown,
The pious ALFRED, King to Justice dear !
• Lord of the harp and liberating spear ;
Mirror of Princes ! Indigent Renown
Might range the starry ether for a crown
Equal to HIS deserts.”*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

TIME was when Winchester, the “royal city,” as Kingsley called it, far out-rivalled London in prosperity and business activity, and if for many generations the Hampshire capital has been left hopelessly behind by the great metropolis, it can still boast a fascination to which London can make no claim. Indeed, of all the ancient cathedral cities of England, over which the peace of the old-time world seems perpetually to brood, there is not one which can compete with Winchester for richness of historical interest. And, as is not usually the case, that historic interest becomes more living and intense with every passing generation. “It is not in death, but in the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

beautiful tranquillity of serene old age that Winchester reposes in her sweet green valley low down among the swelling hills that compass her about. No English city has such a noble record in the past, or a life more peaceful in our rushing, hasteful age."

Though from the time of Egbert to long after the Norman Conquest, the history of Winchester is a summary of the history of England, and hence has memorable associations with the names of Ethelred, Edward the Elder, Canute the Dane, and Norman William, it is mainly because of its reminiscences of Alfred the Great that the city possesses such undying interest. After the lapse of a thousand years Winchester is still permeated by the presence of the great Anglo-Saxon king. Here he spent some part of his boyhood, pupil the while of that St. Swithun whose essential greatness of character is eclipsed in these days by his supposed bad connection with the too watery nature of English skies. Alfred made Winchester the capital of the English people; there he held his court what time his land was at peace; within its walls he devised those wise laws which will ever lend a fragrance to his memory; here he directed the penning of that book which stands first on the illustrious roll of English prose. In

IN OLD ENGLAND

Winchester, too, he laid down the burden of his life, and the soil of that city holds somewhere to this day the precious dust of that perfect king.

In a thousand years, time plays sad havoc with the visible environments of famous men, and



WOLFESEY CASTLE

hence it is not surprising that so far as stones and mortar go, there is little left which can help us to picture the conditions amid which Alfred passed his life. But what little still exists must be sought mainly at Winchester. In the ruins of Wolvesey Castle, for example, the historic imagination possesses rich material to aid it in constructing a picture of one important phase of Alfred's work. It was here that, at his com-

LITERARY BY-PATHS

mand and under his direction, the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle” was compiled and copied. By the common consent of scholars, this book is the first history of the English people, and the “earliest and most venerable monument of English prose.” To stand among the ruins of Wolvesey Castle, then, is to stand at the fountain-head of our literature. On this spot, within these grey, crumbling walls, there took rise that stream of English writing which for these thousand years has rolled onward, ever increasing in volume and breadth. Parts of the “Chronicle” were written by Alfred himself, and the ancient manuscript, that which used to be chained to a desk in Wolvesey Castle, so that all might read it who could, may still be seen in the library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

Alfred was buried first in the Old Minster at Winchester, but the canons affirmed that his ghost walked at nights and gave them no rest, and in the end they prevailed upon his son Edward to remove the remains to the New Minster, which Alfred himself had founded in order to keep a certain prior at his court. In the New Minster the King found peace for a century or so, but when the monks were turned out of that building and sent to Hyde Abbey in another

HYDE ABBEY



part of the city, they took with them the sacred dust of the monarch who had founded their house. With the burial of Alfred's body at Hyde Abbey it vanishes from our sight. For in the eighteenth century Hyde Abbey was almost wholly demolished, and then the last authentic traces of the King's resting-place disappeared. Of the Abbey itself there are only one or two fragments remaining. There is the entrance gateway, the corbels of which are thought to be portraits of Alfred and his son, and on the other side of that gateway is a building, now used for farm purposes, which formed part of the original structure. Some years ago, however, during excavations here, a coffin was laid bare which is thought to have been that of the King, and this was reverently re-buried at the east end of Hyde Church on the opposite side of the street.

Amid these scenes which are so redolent of his memory, the pilgrim cannot fail to ask himself what manner of man was this king whom all conspire to honour, who is described as "the only perfect man of action recorded in history," who is held up as the typical man of the Anglo-Saxon race at its best and noblest? Historical criticism has handled very roughly the stories with which the school-books of childhood used to brighten

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the record of his life, and we are told that we must no longer believe he was so impractical a man as to allow his own supper to get burnt on the hearth, or that he was so unwary a general as to go about masquerading with a harp in the enemy's camp. But are not the critics unjust in their treatment of Asser, that Welsh priest whose life of Alfred is our chief source of information? They seem to accept his authority for dry-as-dust statements, but pooh-pooh him when he indulges in a little Boswellianism. Let Asser speak for Alfred for a moment, then, speak out of that overflowing admiration which the great king had the secret to inspire, living or dead, in those who had looked on his face, and in those who think of him a thousand years after. "He was loved by his father and mother," writes Asser, "and even by all the people, above all by his brothers. As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in look, in speech, and in manners he was more graceful than they. His noble nature implanted in him from his cradle a love of wisdom above all things." Is it any wonder that when he took the crown it was "amid the acclamations of all the people," and that when he came forth to lead his men

IN OLD ENGLAND

against the Danes, his followers “were joyful at his presence”?

After all it is but a mere handful of stories that we have of Alfred, and we will not be robbed of



SUPPOSED GRAVE OF ALFRED THE GREAT

these. We shall go on believing that he let the cakes burn on the hearth while lost in thought on the future of his country; no pedantic verdict shall explain away the legend which makes him become his own intelligence officer by assuming the guise of a harper in order to penetrate the

LITERARY BY-PATHS

enemy's camp ; nor shall any criticism shake our faith in that pretty story of his youth which tells how his mother offered a richly illuminated book to that one of her sons who could first repeat its contents, with the result that Alfred won the prize.

Although, thanks to the fears of those timid canons, the cathedral does not enshrine the dust of Alfred the Great, there still repose beneath its roof those mortuary chests in which an early bishop of the diocese deposited the bones of Egbert, Canute, Edmund, and other kings. Even if these quaint caskets could be inspected more closely than is possible owing to their elevated position on the summits of the tracery screens of the choir, there are probably few who would regard them otherwise than with feelings of "cold curiosity or vague admiration." It would be otherwise had the dust of Alfred retained a shrine here ; he is a living memory still, with power to inspire a personal affection rarely felt for kings ; but these other memorials of royalty somehow lack the power to touch the heart. While wandering through Westminster Abbey, Washington Irving noticed that visitors always remained longest in the vicinity of Poets' Corner. "They linger about these monuments

IN OLD ENGLAND

as about the tombs of friends and companions ; for indeed there is something of companionship between author and reader. Other men are known to posterity only through the medium of history, which is continually growing faint and obscure ; but the intercourse between the author and his fellow-men is ever new, active, and immediate."

Happily, Winchester Cathedral does not lack memorials of some of those great dead for whom all men entertain a personal affection. For example, in the floor of Prior Silkstede's Chapel a black marble stone marks the last resting-place of Izaak Walton. As soon as he was released from the burden of business, this childlike old man, with the ruddy cheek and laughing eye, as Hazlitt imagined him, passed peacefully from parsonage to deanery, or bishop's palace, lingering longest, we may be sure, where quiet rivers most abounded. This helps to explain why the home of his son-in-law, Dr. Hawkins, who was a prebendary of Winchester, proved so increasingly attractive in the angler's later years. On the ninetieth anniversary of his birth, Izaak Walton, sheltered by his son-in-law's roof at Winchester, sat down to write his will. Having disposed of his principal properties to his son-in-law, his

LITERARY BY-PATHS

daughter, and his son, and having arranged that these three shall each come into the possession of a memorial ring bearing the motto "Love my Memory. I. W.", the old man added, "I



IZAAK WALTON'S GRAVE

desire my burial to be near the place of my death, and free from all ostentation or charge, but privately." Four months later, when the great frost of 1683 held all England in its iron grip, the venerable old man entered into his rest. So this grave was prepared for him in Prior Silkstede's Chapel, and the quaint inscription tells that —

IN OLD ENGLAND

Here Resteth the body of
MR ISAAC WALTON
Who Dyed the 13th of December
1683.

Alas ! hees gone before
Gone to return noe more
Our panting Breasts aspire
After their aged Sire
Whose well-spent life did last
Full ninety yeares and past
But now he hath begun
That which will ne're be done
Crown'd with eternall blisse
We wish our Souls with his.

Votis Modestis sic flerunt Liberi

When that quiet funeral took place in Prior Silkstede's Chapel, none of the sorrowing mourners who were there taking farewell of the aged angler saw the fresco which is now seen to adorn the wall of that tiny chapel. Its subject is the calling of Peter, who, in an attitude of fear, holds tightly to the prow of his boat, and its existence has only been known some fifty years. How it would have pleased Walton could he have been aware of this painting on the walls of his death chamber, for he was never weary of exalting his art by dwelling upon the fact that for four of his apostles Christ chose fishermen, and that "He never reproved these for their employment

LITERARY BY-PATHS

or calling, as He did scribes and the money-lenders."

There is a legend which tells that a verger of Winchester Cathedral, questioned repeatedly as to the whereabouts of a certain lady's tomb in that minster, once enquired whether there was anything remarkable about that lady that so many should ask to see the spot where she lay,—which would seem to show that Jane Austen is not without honour save in the city where she died.

In one respect Jane Austen is more fortunate in her Winchester associations than John Keats. Two years after the novelist had breathed her last in the peaceful old cathedral city, the poet dwelt within its walls for a couple of months. It was at the fall of the year, and as he wandered amid the meadows which encircle the city so pleasantly on either side, there came to the poet that inspiration which has left its mark on English literature for all time in the haunting "Ode to Autumn." But Keats came and went without the people of Winchester being aware of his presence. Although the house in which Jane Austen died in 1817 is known and marked with a tablet, the house in which Keats lived in 1819 is unknown, and, it is to be feared, hopelessly lost to the literary pilgrim.

IN OLD ENGLAND

When Jane Austen, in May 1817, removed to lodgings at Winchester, to avail herself of expert medical advice, the hand of death was

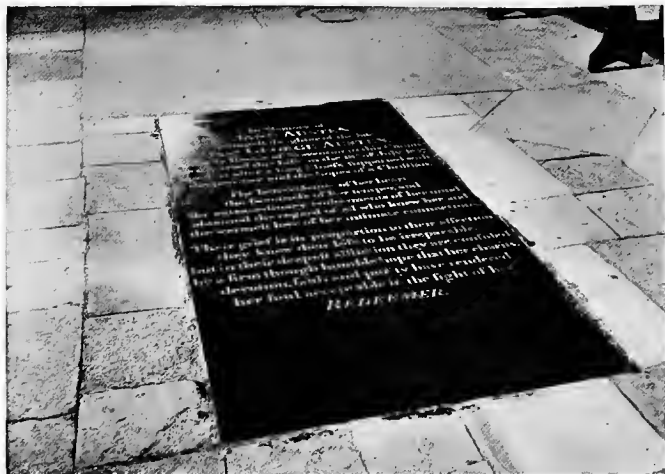


HOUSE IN WHICH JANE AUSTEN DIED

already upon her. It was in College Street she took up her quarters, in a house adjoining the famous college of William of Wykeham. "Our lodgings," she wrote, "are very comfortable.

LITERARY BY-PATHS

We have a neat little drawing-room, with a bow window overlooking Dr. Gabell's garden." In the same hopeful letter she makes a playful allusion to her doctor. "Mr. Lyford says he will cure me, and if he fails, I shall draw up a



JANE AUSTEN'S GRAVE

memorial and lay it before the Dean and Chapter, and have no doubt of redress from that pious, learned, and disinterested body." Jane Austen was even then nearer needing the services of the Dean, or one of his clergy, than she knew. To the kindly friend who asked in the closing hour if there were anything she wanted, Jane Austen

IN OLD ENGLAND.

made answer, "Nothing but death." For her tired body that wish was soon granted, but for her fame there is an enduring immortality. Close by the side of that bow window with which she was so pleased, a tablet now records that "In this house Jane Austen lived her last days and died July 18th, 1817."

Hardly could there be imagined a more seemly resting-place for Jane Austen than that grey old minster in which her body was laid to rest. There is about this building an aloofness from the feverish haste of modern life which makes complete harmony with the pages of that writer who has mirrored so faithfully a social life so far removed from our own. Her grave must be sought near the centre of the north aisle, and it, like that of Izaak Walton, is covered with a simple slab of black marble. The inscription dwells with characteristic emphasis upon what she was rather than upon what she did. Her own family were more fond of her than proud. "The benevolence of her heart," so runs the inscription, "and the extraordinary endowments of her mind, obtained the regard of all who knew her, and the warmest love of her intimate connections." A variation of the same eulogy may be read on the brass which adorns

LITERARY BY-PATHS

the wall of the cathedral opposite the grave ; “endeared to her family by the varied charms of her character ” is its testimony.

It may seem incongruous that a building so pronouncedly ecclesiastical as a deanery should



WINCHESTER DEANERY

revive memories of so notorious a courtesan as Nell Gwynne ; but the fact that the deanery at Winchester, which may be found within the exquisite precincts of the cathedral, does recall that fascinating woman casts no reflection upon the worthy Dr. Ken. It was all the fault of the “Merry Monarch ” himself. When Charles II

IN OLD ENGLAND

was visiting Winchester while engrossed with his plans for the building of a royal residence in that historic city, Mistress Nell was, of course, in attendance, and it became necessary to provide her with a lodging. It happened that Dr. Ken, then prebendary of the cathedral, had a snug little home at the deanery, and Charles promptly coveted the place for his mistress. He himself was lodging at the deanery, and the arrangement he suggested would, no doubt, have been extremely convenient. But Dr. Ken did not see eye to eye with his monarch ; in fact, he stoutly refused to give Mistress Nell the shelter of the deanery roof. Charles was too sensible a man to take umbrage at such a creditable exhibition of independence, and when the Bishopric of Bath and Wells became vacant, he promptly enquired, "Where is the good little man who refused his lodging to poor Nell?"

Emerson has told how he and Carlyle, when returning from their memorable pilgrimage to Stonehenge, "stopped at the Church of Saint Cross, and, after looking through the quaint antiquity, we demanded a piece of bread and a draught of beer, which the founder, Henry de Blois in 1136, commanded should be given to everyone who should ask it at the gate."

LITERARY BY-PATHS

For more than seven hundred years one day has been the same as any other at this "quaint antiquity" of St. Cross. In that long span of time empires have grown and decayed, but their



THE ENTRANCE TO ST. CROSS

coming or their passing has made no stir in the peaceful life of these time-stained cloisters. Since the twelfth century, when Bishop Henry de Blois reared this monastic almshouse amid the green fields by the side of the river Itchen,

IN OLD ENGLAND

there has been no change at St. Cross, and the brethren, in their accomplishment of the "daily round, the common task," in the reign of King Edward VII perpetuate the life of their predecessors in the reign of King Stephen.

It is a trite remark that the monks of the olden time knew where to pitch their tents—a remark which is supported by the nature-setting of every ancient abbey in England. Renunciation of the world, apparently, was not deemed inconsistent with the selection of the most picturesque spot possible in which to endure that renunciation! True, St. Cross is not exactly a monastery, but its original foundation approached near enough to that class of religious establishment to warrant Henry de Blois in selecting a site for his building on the monkish principle of tempering one's renunciation of the world as far as possible. And what a site it is! At the foot of St. Catherine's Hill, about a mile from Winchester, the placid Itchen has moistened a little valley into a verdant paradise, and here, amid bosky trees, with their roots deep buried under velvety sward, Henry de Blois built his Hospital of St. Cross.

Not all the honour of St. Cross belongs to Henry de Blois. Three centuries after the first

LITERARY BY-PATHS

foundation was made, Cardinal Beaufort added to its wealth, and to the present day there is a distinction between Henry de Blois brethren and Beaufort brethren. The distinction, however, practically resolves itself into one of dress merely, for while the pensioners of St. Cross are attired in a long black gown, whose sole ornament is that of a silver cross on the left breast, the Beaufort brethren are resplendent in a red robe embroidered with a cardinal's hat and tassels. The two foundations conjointly provide a peaceful old-age haven for seventeen brethren, who, with their delightful little homes, their well-tended gardens, their daily dinner from the common hall, and their modest income of hard cash, provide the statesman with ideal examples of an old-age pension state.

Under the Beaufort Tower, which ensures lasting memory for at least one of the founder's names, is situated the porter's lodge, and in that lodge the visitor finds the raw materials by which St. Cross maintains its most interesting survival of the past. Those materials are a barrel of beer and a loaf of bread. No one knocks in vain at the door of St. Cross. It is a picturesque and irritating legend of history that in the good old times every great house of England kept open

IN OLD ENGLAND

table, whereat the hungry wayfarer was certain of a welcome and a meal. Perhaps that picture is a pleasing generalisation of the historic imagination, but St. Cross can claim to furnish concrete proof of its truth in at least one case. For seven centuries the hungry and the thirsty have never called here to be sent empty away, and hence, even in this era of enlightenment, when every pauper may have his night's rest and a meal in exchange for labour, there is still one hospitable shelter in England which keeps its continuity



THE DOLE AT ST. CROSS

with the past by giving every caller a horn of beer and a slice of bread for nothing. Of course there are many people who drink the beer and eat the bread of St. Cross without having any pressing necessity for either. Emerson and Carlyle cannot have been distressingly hungry or wholly devoid of cash with which to provide for their bodily needs on the day they called here. But their visit has added another association of interest to St. Cross, for the silver-mounted cups and the wooden platter which served the usual

LITERARY BY-PATHS

dole to those notable visitors are now numbered among the relics of the place. Nor are they relics merely, for the ordinary visitor is privileged to have his dole handed out in the same cup and on the same platter. Still, a certain distinction is made between callers at St. Cross. For the use of the tramp there is a larger horn, innocent of silver mountings, and with that longer draught of ale is supplied a portion of bread in keeping therewith.

Among the show buildings of St. Cross are the old kitchen, the dining-hall, and the church. Time has stood still in that kitchen as well as elsewhere in this mediæval retreat. All the appliances for cooking are of a long past time, and would strike the twentieth-century *chef* as little better than relics of a barbaric age. In the dining-hall it is still the past rather than the present which is in evidence — the black leathern jacks, the candlesticks, the salt-cellars, the pewter dishes, and the dinner-bell, all dating from the fifteenth century. The church, too, is of venerable age, its oldest portions having been reared in the twelfth century.

In wandering round the cloisters of this old-world haven, which give witness so mutely of an age so foreign to our own, the memory strives to recall some mellowed passage of prose or poetry

IN OLD ENGLAND

by which to voice the emotions which rise unbidden in the heart, and perhaps there is no passage so perfectly in harmony with this scene as that in which Ruskin has so subtly analysed the charm of ancient buildings. “The greatest glory



IN THE CLOISTERS OF ST. CROSS

of a building,” he wrote, “is not in its stones nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity. It is in their lasting witness against

LITERARY BY-PATHS

men, in their quiet contrast with the transitional characters of all things, in the strength which, through the lapse of seasons and times, and the decline and birth of dynasties, and the changing of the face of the earth, and of the limits of the sea, maintains its sculptured shapeliness for a time insuperable, connects forgotten and following ages with each other, and half constitutes the identity, as it concentrates the sympathy, of nations: it is in that golden stain of time that we are to look for the real light and colour and preciousness of architecture; and it is not until a building has assumed this character, till it has been entrusted with the fame and hallowed by the deeds of men, till its walls have been witness of suffering and its pillars rise out of the shadows of death, that its existence, more lasting as it is than that of natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with even so much as these possess of language and of life."

Having wandered afield from Winchester to visit St. Cross, the pilgrim will not begrudge another hour or so that he may gaze upon the old schoolhouse in which Pope received the beginnings of his education, especially as the road thither will take him past the mansion in which Benjamin Franklin wrote the early chapters of

IN OLD ENGLAND

his "Autobiography." Both these buildings are in the hamlet of Twyford, which claims, and not unjustly, to be the queen of Hampshire villages.

Despite the fact, noted by Lowell in his penetrating essay, that we know more about Pope



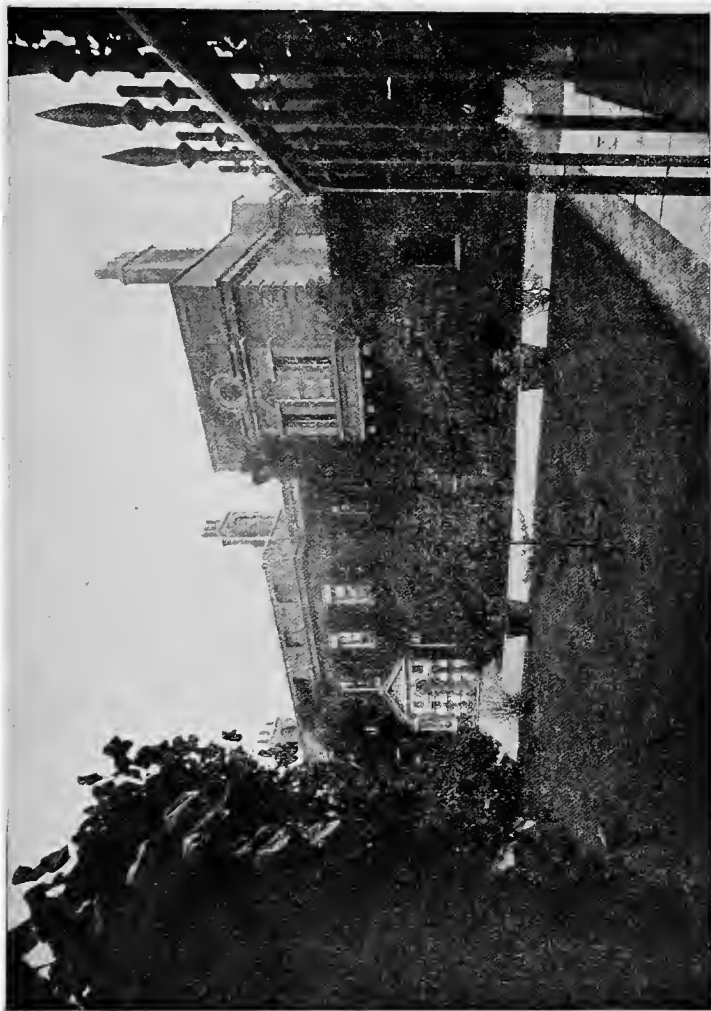
POPE'S SCHOOLHOUSE AT TWYFORD

than about any other poet, that "he kept no secrets about himself," he was singularly reticent concerning the incidents of his boyhood days. No doubt there is little to say about a boy of eight, which was the age of the poet when he attended school at Twyford, but Pope was so prematurely old that even the first decade of

LITERARY BY-PATHS

such a youth might have been expected to yield something of interest. Beyond the bare fact, however, that he was sent to school in this building, practically nothing is known of his sojourn in Twyford village. Although the house has been transformed into labourers' cottages, the large central doorway is still unaltered, and it is not difficult to imagine the appearance of the building as it was in the poet's boyhood. Probably the fact that he was a weakly child accounts for his having been sent so far into the country away from his London home, and it is not idle to suppose that his acquaintance with rural life at such an impressionable age contributed not a little to the early ripening of the pastoral side of his muse. Unconsciously, perhaps, yet none the less effectively, his sojourn in this lovely village stored his mind with the simple yet attractive images which go to make up his picture of "The Quiet Life," a masterly poem to be placed to the credit of a boy of twelve, and thus written four years after his Twyford days. Here, if anywhere in the whole of England, might it be truly said,

"Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground."



TWYFORD HOUSE

IN OLD ENGLAND

On the way back to Winchester, on the left-hand side of the road, and hidden by a high, ivy-clad wall, stands Twyford House, immemorially associated with the inception and first chapters of the famous "Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin." "Expecting," he wrote in the opening paragraph of that book, "the enjoyment of a few weeks' uninterrupted leisure," he bethought him to employ the time usefully by tracing the steps by which he had raised himself to "a state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world." In that year, 1771, Twyford House was the home of Dr. Shipley, the Bishop of St. Asaph, and here the illustrious "self-taught American" spent several pleasant and well-earned vacations. Opposite the house stands a row of trees known as "Franklin's Grove," because there the philosopher was wont to pace to and fro for hours at a stretch, meditating, no doubt, upon the tangled condition of New England affairs, or perhaps conning over again those forthright episodes of his life which lend such an unfailing charm to his famous book.

Twyford House forms a not unfitting climax to a visit to Royal Winchester. Yonder lies the ancient city, its grey stones speaking in mute eloquence of the early origins of England, and

LITERARY BY-PATHS

leading the mind back to those far-off days when her foundations were laid by the Great Alfred in love of liberty and truth ; here are the walls which once sheltered the man who, perhaps more than any other, was typical of the new English race in the New World, who counted no labour irksome in the cause of liberty and peace.

